May 2006

Volume 19 Number 05

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Editorial

A prophet once said "Video Killed the Radio Star."

As the first music video played on the newly conceived MTV in 1981, perhaps what the Buggles meant was that when the music video was born, the game became about much more than just the music.

Video added a whole new level of aesthetics.

It was no longer enough to assemble a talented band, write some killer songs and make a go of it in the music business.

In the MTV era, you had to be "camera friendly" too; where previous generations listened to the radio for the latest bands, the new way was to turn on MTV (or later, Much Music) to catch what's hot.

The Buggles were a one-hit wonder. Were they still together today, they might be singing an entirely different tune, one with words to the effect of "Internet Killed the Video Star."

In fact, a quick Google of that phrase does net some interesting results with that title.

In the new-new world, it's no longer enough to assemble (or perhaps manufacture) a band, write a computer program to spit out some non-offensive but somehow catchy pop tunes, budget a multi-million dollar video shoot and make a go of it in the music game. Now you need a flashy web site and some extensive digital rights management schemes to work in the background and keep your less tech-savvy fans from sharing your creation with the world, bypassing the retail chain altogether.

Perhaps you want to be really bold and include a root kit on your newest CD to co-opt portions of fans' computers.

The point stands. Ideas, be they in music, business or personal communications, are much more powerful when they are presented with motion. Whether it's a video business card or a motion photo slideshow, the audience is more receptive and your message is delivered with more impact.

Convenient then that these and a great many other video related topics are covered in the pages that follow.

Enjoy the issue,
Andrew Moore-Crispin
Editor-in-Chief

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Hit the Road: Ultra-portable video

Lately there's been a lot of talk about portable video players and the ability to watch your favourite television shows and podcasts no matter where you go, but there's another kind of portable video: the ability to record video no matter where you go.

There are a number of different types of video cameras out there. The most popular type is still undoubtedly the MiniDV camera, with DVD cameras certainly picking up steam. Both of those types of cameras can still be a bit bulky, because they require moving media and the mechanical transport inside to make sure everything is moving properly. That's why – if you want to be truly portable – you might consider a solid state camera.

Solid state cameras make use of flash memory technology. That's the same type of memory used by the majority of digital still cameras out there.

Until recently, flash memory wasn't quite up to the task of recording video, because its write speed was too low for anything but rudimentary-quality video. Ongoing improvements in flash memory have now made it feasible for flash to be used for full-motion video and even high definition video.

The downside is that flash-based video cameras aren't exactly cheap, especially if they record in high definition. Worse, flash memory cards will still only hold a limited amount of data on them at this point, so you may find yourself stocking up on removable memory cards if you don't want to have to offload your video to a notebook computer several times a day. You can get a 2GB SecureDigital (SD) card for around about $250.

Samsung SportsCam Extreme SC-X210L

www.samsung.ca $699 (approx)

Samsung's SportsCam Extreme is one of my perennial favourites for one key reason: in addition to a 10x optical zoom lens built right into the body of the camera, it comes with an external lens module that you can strap around your arm or your head in order to record yourself tearing down a ski hill at a zillion miles an hour.

This new model bumps up the internal memory to 1GB, but if you want to add more, there's a SecureDigital slot hidden behind a door on the front of the camera. The camera's capable of shooting in DVD-quality MPEG-4 (720x480, at up to 30 frames per second).

At two inches, the LCD screen is tiny, but it does the job.

As with previous models, the SC-X210L has multiple functions, including digital still pictures, MP3/WMA playback, and the ability to function as a webcam when connected to your computer via USB 2.0.

Sanyo Xacti VPC-HD1

www.sanyo.ca $1,099

Sanyo's Xacti lineup features some of the best-designed solid state video cameras on the market: they come with a fairly natural handgrip that gives easy access to all of the controls, which are located in a comfortable place for the thumb to reach. The new HD1 model bumps up the specs of the Xacti line to include full HD recording (720p, or 1280x760 resolution) and 5.1 megapixel still images. The Xacti VPC-HD1 features a 2.2-inch OLED screen.

The camera accepts SecureDigital memory, but the bad news is that SD cards are sold separately. You'll want to buy as large a card as you can afford, since a 2GB card will only hold 29 minutes at best quality.

One of the camera's more interesting capabilities is the ability to capture a digital still photograph while recording a movie. There is a penalty though: when the camera takes the digital photo, there will be a slight pause in the video as the photo records to the memory card.

The HD1 comes with a charging dock that also has component output, allowing you to view your videos on your high definition television.

By Sean Carruthers

Solid state pros and cons

Pros:

- compact
- no moving parts to wear out
- often double as still cameras and even MP3 players
- no need for real-time video capture – files are drag-and-drop
- high-def models available

Cons:

- focus and exposure not as fast as on full-sized models
- can't fit much best-quality video on even the highest capacity memory cards (and high-capacity cards are expensive)
- smaller form factor means small hand jitters are magnified more than with full-sized cams
- high-definition models expensive

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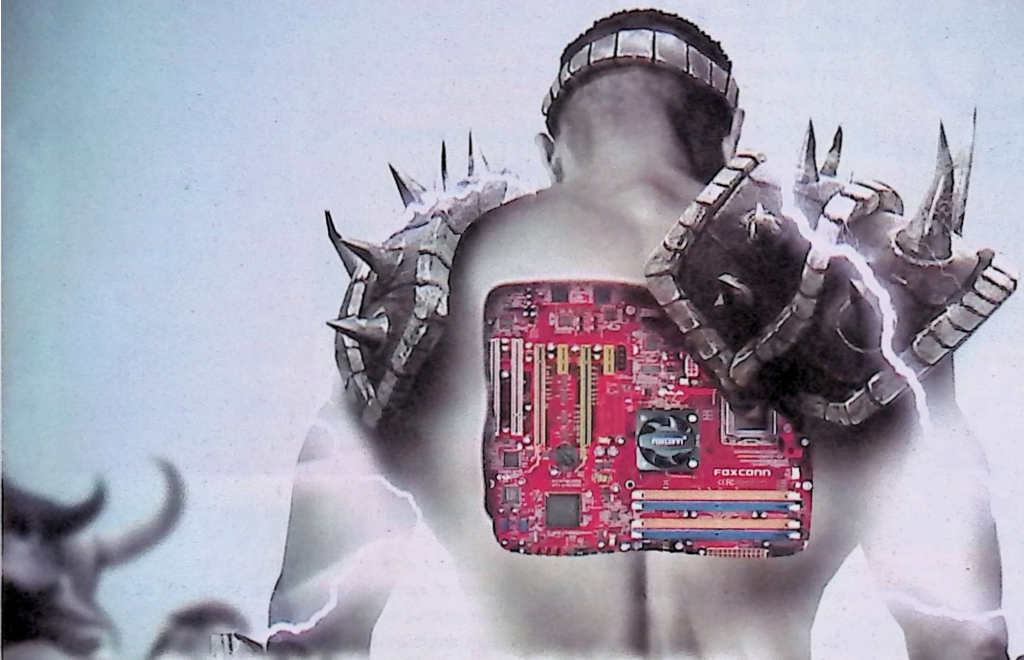

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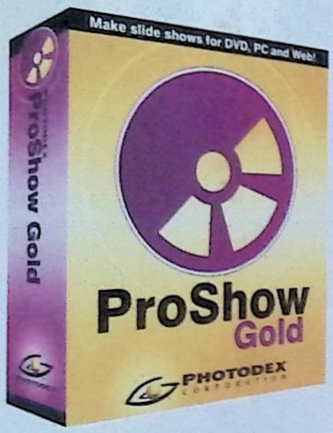
Show off your images with a slideshow



Living digitally means easily sharing anything on your computer, including photographs. Whether you email your latest pics, post them to an online album site or have people crowd around your computer, instead of just a random set of images, why not make a slideshow?

Slideshows combine text titles and captions, images, and music (and sometimes spoken commentary) and are therefore a very rich method of telling an engaging story. Slideshow software packages range from free to a few hundred dollars and vary in capabilities. ProShow Gold 2.6 from Photodex Corp. (www.Photodex.com) is one of the top performers, relatively simple to use but offering a lot of power for a reasonable price. You can download it for US$69.95 or if you buy the boxed product, you also get a printed manual.

There are a handful of features that add pro-level sparkle to your presentation and ProShow implements them into an interface that's easy to use. The workspace is similar to that of a video editor, so you drop images into one time line and audio into another. Icons for transition effects appear between the images. The level of customizability that this package offers is very impressive – right-mouse click on an image and a detailed panel opens with all the options available to you. I found using this package to build long or short slide shows very satisfying. Some of those killer features:

Transition effects: Transition effects change how one image is replaced by the next. For example, in a dissolve images appear to meld into each other, softening their flow. ProShow Gold has a few hundred (280 says the company) and if you wanted, you could use a different transition between every image.

Motion effects: ProShow has three motion effects – zoom, pan and rotate – to give the illusion of motion to still images. These can be applied individually or in combination, and you can also alter how the effect plays out (slow to fast, constant, fast to slow, etc.).

Audio and Synchronization: With the single audio track you can't do true multitrack audio mixing, although there is a way to add a narrative comment to slides by using a microphone plugged into your sound card and recording directly into ProShow. To my mind this is the weakest part of the program. Otherwise the audio options are quite decent. You can set the images and music to end together, or you can have a group of images fit within a specific audio segment, or you can manually synchronize each image individually to the beat of the music.

Output and packaging: ProShow's output options are impressive, ranging from creating a menu-driven DVD that can be viewed on a DVD player hooked to a TV set through other options like Video CD, right down to a low-res version that can be emailed.

Overall, this is a fun package to use, but also a powerful one. I especially like the easy way you can combine transition, motion and image effects into some amazing sequences – rapid fire hard cuts for action slowing into a lazier pace with images dissolving into each other for an entirely different mood.

By David Tanaka

All you wanted to know about Photoshop's filters

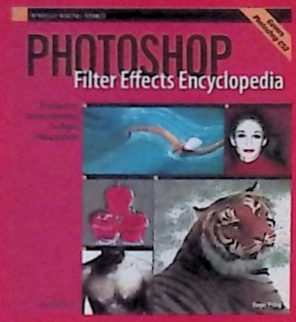
Photoshop Filter Effects Encyclopedia

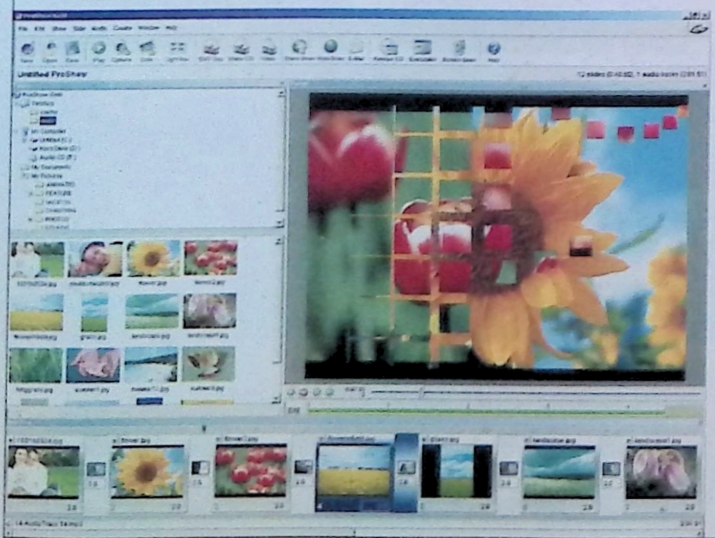
By Roger Pring

ISBN 0-596-10021-3 Soft cover, 192 pages

Published by O'Reilly Price: $41.95

Photoshop has so many special effects filters that it's often hard to remember what they do. Photoshop Filter Effects Encyclopedia makes it easy to keep track. Each effect has a "how it works" explanation of the controls and options available. Then the "using..." section gives a step-by-step account of the effect being applied to a photo. The examples are well chosen for the most part, and I found myself often thinking as I went through the book, "so that's what that filter is good for." The table of contents and thorough index make organized searching easy, but just leafing through at random is a pleasure in itself.





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DV, or Not DV

The Future On Demand: Developments in Digital Video

Making a great quote about the future is a real challenge; just ask Bill Gates. The risk is that you will be partially contradicted – if not totally blown away – by the time we see the sun again.

These days, one of my favourite future quotes is from William Gibson: "The future is already here – it's just unevenly distributed."

As exciting and paradigm-shattering as developments in digital media techniques and technology are, they of course do not come from nowhere. People are already working today with what will be a hot new gadget tomorrow.

The cool tool release cycle is a complex affair, influenced not only by technical capabilities, but by market realities and corporate priorities. It's often a trickle down affair, with core functions defined in military and medical test labs, or advanced academic and technical research facilities. Such new technology reaches the marketplace after scaling – or dumbing – down certain features for end user applications. Then, clever and creative customers find their own app, make their own mods and develop whole new uses for the technology, and the cycle continues. Just look at what's happening with the iPod.

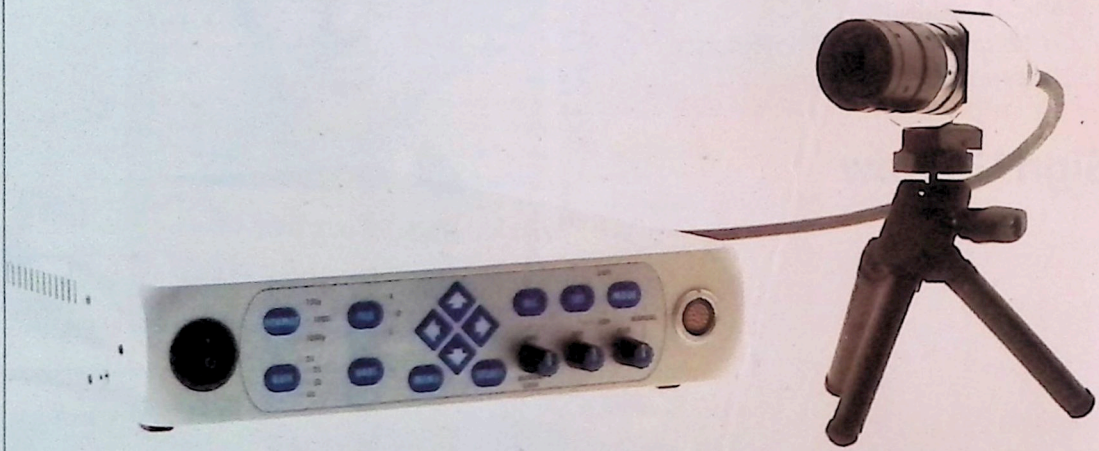
Starting as a fairly simple – some would say derivative – portable listening device, it's now a key component of the digital living room, the jumping off point for a media-on-demand world, even a defining symbol for a new generation.

Which brings up another future quote, from Sir Winston Churchill: "The empires of the future are the empires of the mind."

From the first images crudely created on a cave wall, to today's diverse and dynamic digital landscape, it's the hand, eye and mind that combines humanity with technology to create real change.

So what will you do with some of these new tools?

Super (or Quad) Definition TV: So you think HD is all the rage? New, even higher resolution displays are coming, with upwards of 1,600 lines (compared to today's 1080) of video information. Addressable pixels, for those who count, will increase to 3840x2160 from today's roughly 1280x1080 (or 720).



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So don't be at all surprised to see TVs (can we still call them that?) continue to grow in size, features and functions over the next little while, much as personal computers have grown in size and capabilities in the past few years. Not just resolution, but storage, broadband and wireless access, control centre capabilities and more will be added.

For those wondering what type of camera will fill such a display, not to worry:

There are some folks at a company called Red Digital Cinema (www.red.com) working on what seems to be a 4K digital movie camera, about twice what top of the line products on the market now offer. Using a CMOS type sensor, the word is that the Red camera will deliver 60 fps, uncompressed 4:4:4 video, or compress it down to a much more familiar 720p and 19 Mbps.

Another company called Iconix Video (www.iconixvideo.com) will soon deliver on its promise of a new high definition camera head, weighing about 2.5 ounces. For a proposed price of $16,000 (lots of money to most of us, but barely a ripple for high end broadcasters or filmmaker) the multiform HD POV camera will capture video as 720p (actually about 700 lines) and 1080i (roughly 900 lines), and in frame rates of 24, 25, 30, 50 and 60 per second.

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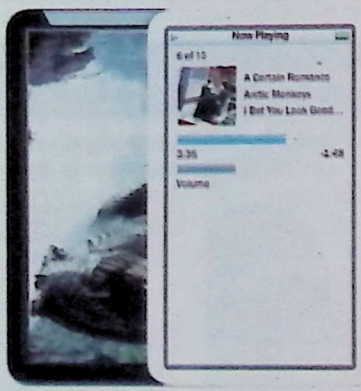
Olympus has shown its extra high-resolution video system – camera and recorder – that acquires 1,600-line images with four 8.3 million-pixel HD image sensors; the company calls it "Quad HD" or "Octavision," depending. The output of the camera is said to be 3840x2160 with over 1,600 TV lines of horizontal resolution (but it weighs about 20 pounds).

Companies like Thompson, with its Viper camera, and our own Canadian manufacturer, Dalso, also have 4K super high resolution cameras, and the trend to higher res acquisition and presentation will definitely continue.

Sony, for example, is showing its 4K digital cinema projector res system with 10,000 lumen brightness rating, RAID storage, remote control and 16 audio channels built-in. It will hit the market with a suggested price just under $100,000. Its weight and price are a little more than most home theatre enthusiasts might bear today, but tomorrow is on the way.



Digital technology always gets cheaper, more functional, and smaller – especially if the projector from Light Blue Optics is any indication. Expect that by the end of the year, a new generation of pocket-sized digital video projectors will be available, offering full colour imagery at resolutions up to 2048 x1280.

Incorporating laser projection and computer-generated holograms (CGHs), the new projectors are a technological alternative to conventional image projection, and are so small that a tiny projector producing large images could, for the first time, be integrated into a laptop, a PDA, or even a mobile phone.

Smaller digital bits and bytes aside, developments in nanotechnology and molecular manufacturing will shrink tomorrow's tools even further.

Geneticists and chemical engineers at the University of Toronto recently presented a fascinating lecture on the molecular movie, and the ways that are being developed to directly observe how atoms move in real time. To make such a movie, scientists and researchers have developed a new type of camera that uses electron pulses to light up atomic motion. It has a shutter speed of 100 femtoseconds or 1/10th of a millionth of a millionth of a second.

Right now, the applications are for chemistry, biology and physics - but Churchill and his followers may have something to say about that!

By Lee Rickwood

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Socket	Socket 939
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Chipset	ATI® RS482+SB400
Memory	Dual-Channel DDR
Graphics	DDR400/333/266 DDR SDRAM
Communication	On Chip Radeon X300 based
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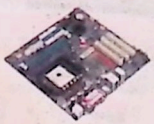
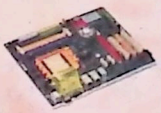


Socket	Socket 754
Processor	AMD® Athlon™ 64/ Sempron™
Chipset	ATI® RS482 & SB400
Memory	Single-Channel DDR
Graphics	DDR400/333/266 DDR SDRAM
Communication	On Chip Radeon X300 based
Others	10/100 LAN
	Serial ATA, 6-Channel Audio

KA1 MVP



Socket	Socket 939
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Graphics	DDR400/333/266/200 DDR SDRAM
Communication	ATI Radeon® Xpress 200 CrossFire™
Others	Dual LAN
	IEEE 1394A, Serial ATA,
	8-Channel Audio

PA1 MVP

Socket	Socket 775
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Chipset	ATI RD400X + SB450
Memory	Dual-Channel DDR2
Graphics	DDR2 667/533/400 DDR2 SDRAM
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The camcorder dilemma: MiniDV, DVD, or hard disk?

In a perfect world, advances in camcorder technology would always lead to image improvement. In the real world that just isn't the case.

For proof, we need look no further than the video camera's industry's current shift towards DVDs as a storage medium. Simply stated, DVD camcorders don't deliver video that is any clearer, sharper, or more colourful than that made possible by MiniDV technology. In fact, DVD camcorders can't match the quality video produced by high-end, high-definition MiniDV video cameras.

So why would anyone choose a DVD camcorder? Part of the reason is perception. For several years consumers have been told that DVD offers the best video quality available, providing higher definition and better colour accuracy than VHS. So, when DVD camcorders started appearing on the market many people assumed that they must be a step up from MiniDV, which, like VHS, is a tape-based technology. That's simply not true.

However, many consumers who understand the risk of slightly inferior picture quality are choosing to purchase a DVD camcorder anyway. Why? Ease of use.

MiniDV can be a difficult technology to work with. First there's the constant winding of tape to try to find the clip you're looking for. Then there's the issue of transferring your video to your PC with the best picture quality possible, which involves choosing the proper connections and plenty of waiting time as the MiniDV tape plays and your PC records.

DVD camcorders, on the other hand, make searching for clips as easy as selecting scenes in a movie played on your DVD player. And most users find copying files to a PC from a DVD to be a far more intuitive process than transferring video stored on MiniDV tape.

So, now that we have the whole MiniDV/DVD issue cleared up, let's open an entirely new can of worms with another burgeoning video recording technology: hard disk.

It's been a long time coming, but direct-to-hard-drive video is finally here. The advantages are obvious: there are no tapes or discs to mess around with, it provides the ability to record longer durations of uninterrupted video (up to almost 40 hours on some models), and it makes scene editing and file transfer a breeze.

The disadvantages? A higher price tag, for one. Just like a 60GB iPod costs hundreds of dollars more than a 4GB model, so too does the price increase for hard disk camcorders with larger storage capacities. An even more pressing problem is that hard disk camcorder manufacturers have

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yet to figure out a way to achieve picture quality on par with MiniDV and DVD camcorders. Yet another hitch is finite hard disk storage. What do you do if you're on vacation, fill your hard disk, and have no way to download your video to free up space? Delete video? Buy another camcorder?

The take-home message is simply this: a single, perfect camcorder doesn't exist – yet. You'll have to weigh the pros and cons of each category – MiniDV, DVD, and hard disk – and determine which fits your needs best.

To help you get started, here are a couple of models from each group worth checking out.

MiniDV

Canon Elura 100

www.canon.ca

The flagship model in Canon's affordable MiniDV line-up, the $500 Elura 100 allows users to shoot in widescreen format, delivers an 800x digital zoom, and provides functionality for users to shoot 1.33-megapixel still images while recording.

Sony HDR-HC3 Handycam

www.sonystyle.ca

A prosumer camcorder running around $1,500, Sony's HDR-HC3 Handycam captures widescreen images in true high definition and comes equipped with several handy extras, such as cool 240 frames-per-second slow motion mode. It's also capable of snapping off impressively clear 4-megapixel photographs.

Samsung SC-D165

DVD

Samsung SC-D165

www.samsung.ca

This $650 model from Samsung is an entry level DVD camcorder squarely targeted at casual users who want minimum hassle. It supports all recordable DVD formats, has a 4-in-1 memory card slot, comes with a remote, and is compatible with PictBridge devices.

Canon DC40

www.canon.ca

It took Canon a while to get into the DVD game, but they got off to a great

www.NotebookForum.ca

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Turion ML32, 512M, 100G
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Acer 5672WLMI $1459
Duo T2300 1.66G, 1024M, 100G, 15.4" WXAG+, DVD+/-RW, 56K, 802.11ABG, ATI X1400 128M, XP Home, Bluetooth, Gigabit LAN

Acer 8204WLMI $2349
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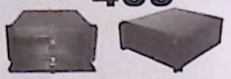

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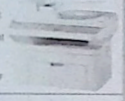

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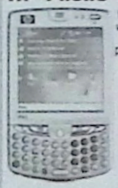

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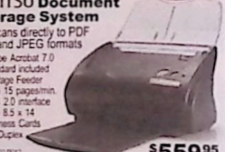

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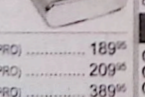

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start with the DC40. It sports a 4.3-megapixel image sensor, the entire width of which is used to capture high resolution 16:9 video, which makes this $1,200 option strong competition against non-HD MiniDV video cameras.

JVC Everio

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www.jvc.ca

Its 0.68-megapixel image sensor isn't anything to write home about, but JVC's 30GB hard disk camcorder, which goes for about $1,200, makes video recording as simple as taking a still picture. Plus, it weighs in at just 400

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grams – less than a pound. A 2.2-megapixel model, the GZ-MG77, is also available for around $200 more.

Sony DCR-SR100 Handycam
www.sonystyle.ca

For only $100 more than the GZ-MG37 you can buy Sony's first hard disk camcorder, which has an image sensor twice the width of the GZ-MG37 and is capable of capturing much more detailed moving pictures. It packs a 30GB hard drive too, and is slated to start shipping in Canada this month.

By Chad Sapieha

Sony DHDR-HC3 Handycam

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Powerful package from Adobe

Is production studio too "Suite?"

It may be a case of too much, or too soon.

Make no mistake, the latest Creative Suite offering from Adobe Systems is a powerful package for professional videographers and media creators.

Unless your requirements for a fully-featured digital video production toolbox are immediate, comprehensive and on-going, this new package will have features you'll never want. But if you regularly create professional media content – for video, HD, DVD, web or print – this package might have everything you'll ever need.

It combines many of the company's most successful and most popular media creation and production tools into one – actually two – new Production Studio bundles. Tools for video editing, DVD authoring, audio composing, photo manipulation, graphic creation and much more are tightly integrated into the new package.

One cannot argue with the comprehensive capabilities built into the software, but one can question whether the total cost – hardware, software, time and money – are worth it in every situation. The latest Production Studio (V2) was just recently released, but already there is talk of Version Three; the rumour mill has it coming out within a year, and in a Mac version, as well. As it stands now, it's available as either Standard or Premium version for Windows XP only.

It comes on five DVDs, some 20GB all told, with almost 10GB of media (including royalty-free materials). Two hours of training material is included with the package.

It requires a minimum 1.5GHz Pentium 4 (more horsepower for high definition work is needed), 1GB of RAM or more, a 7200 rpm hard drive (or RAID 0 array) and an officially supported high end video capture card.

So, the total investment may be a small fortune for some video editors, but there is a treasure chest waiting. Production Studio is greater than the sum of its parts.

It now fully and natively supports HDV (high definition video), and it can handle other video formats with dimensions up to 4096 x 4096 pixels. It can now do synchronous multi-camera editing. There are incredible pixel-based slo-mo video capabilities. Complex dual layer DVDs can be built. Audio can be recorded, mixed and processed. Vector-based graphics, for any application or resolution, can be created.

It does all this in a newly unified and integrated user interface, one that is fully customizable. All apps now share a dockable, scalable workspace – make one window larger, and the adjacent one gets smaller, automatically. There are no more separate palettes cluttering up the screen; each can be docked and sized according to need.

Not only the look and feel of the interface, but the actual functionality is more closely integrated in this package. For example, new and very handy is the ability to capture footage using Premiere Pro from within After Effects – no more switching in and out of programs.

Adobe's new Bridge feature acts as a file browser that can be launched

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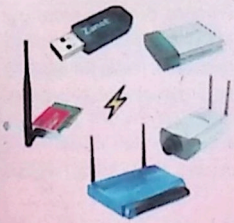

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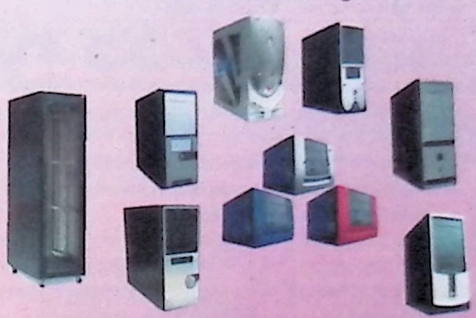

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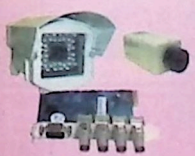

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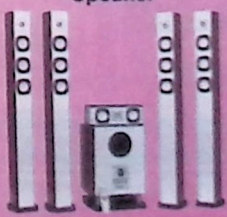

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independently or accessed from any component, and can be used to locate any media asset on the system. Drag-and-drop functionality (from Adobe's Dynamic Link) means you can move After Effects compositions directly into Premiere Pro and Encore DVD, without having to render them first. Changes are automatically updated.

Each of the stand-alone programs now bundled in the Production Studio have their own new features and enhancements. Premiere Pro 2.0, the video editing program, works in real-time with HD, HDV, SD, DV, or film resolutions.

Now, I happen to think one of the coolest additions to the program is something called ClipNotes, a great new way to share, comment on and revise video. Taking a video segment right off the Premiere Pro timeline, ClipNotes turns it into a password-protected, Acrobat-like portable document for comment and review.

The video, either QuickTime or Windows Media format, comes in one of three user selectable presents (to control quality and size). The video can be embedded in an actual PDF or transferred via ftp, or even streamed from a created web page so that others can watch it, comment on it and attach notes about it to the video clip itself.

Once that annotated video is returned, any added comments appear right on the editing timeline, as embedded markers. Although the files created are still pretty large – Adobe should work on reducing the overall size without losing any features – this is a very handy tool for client comments, visitor feedback or production team communications.

There are real business reasons for such a tool now, but I think there will be creative, consumer oriented reasons for its wider use in the future.

Encore DVD 2.0 now has an easy slideshow creation tool, with transitions and pan and zoom effects built-in. Video can be exported right off the Premiere timeline, with makers, for DVD creation. New menu linking and media assets management tools make creating more sophisticated DVDs almost as easy.

In Photoshop CS2, a great new Vanishing Point tool has been added that lets you clone, paint, and paste new visual elements that automatically match the perspective of the surrounding image area. Image Warp is very cool – it automatically wraps or warps an image around any shape, stretching, curling or bending it to fit. Regardless of the tool you use in Photoshop, opening compositions – including those with layers – is a streamlined and updated process within Photoshop, After Effects, Premiere Pro and Encore DVD.

After Effects 7.0 has an improved Graph Editor, that offers complete visual control over keyframe editing on the timeline, allowing for easy synchronization of animated properties, including text, effects, transitions and back-ground movies.

Audition 2.0, the audio editing and restoration package, works with live recordings, imported files or any of the thousands of included royalty-free

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music loops. Clean ups, noise reduction, dialog replacement, hum, click and pop removal and more can be applied to imported AVI, QuickTime or MPEG files. Audio can now be exported as AVI, MPEG, DV, or WMV.

Illustrator CS2 (included in the Production Studio Premium version only) helps create layered, scalable graphics, text and animation no matter how large or small the format's requirement. Newly enhanced painting, drawing and type tools available, including

Live Trace, used to quickly and easily convert video frames or photos to editable and scalable vector paths.

Describing the full power and sophistication of the new Adobe Production Studio is not quick or easy, I'm afraid. There's just so much to this program that its strength is in some way its weakness.

Unless you have a real need for the complete package, and the full power it contains, you would do better looking elsewhere. Adobe does offer consumer-level, scaled back versions of its video editing and photo manipulation tools (Premiere and Photoshop Elements, respectively).

Those programs cost less than $200 each; the full Production Studio Premium package is over $2,000. Somewhere in between, and Adobe might find the real "suite" spot.

By Lee Rickwood

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Calibrate good times, come on!

Let's calibrate. If you want to join Kool and the Gang as an honourary member, nothing will make you more eligible than learning a little about how to calibrate your home theatre display. Okay, maybe you'll become somewhat cooler but probably not "Kool" enough. Who wants to be in a gang anyway? Still, it's nice to be able to optimize your display in order to extract the maximum value from it.

Displays for video are calibrated using test patterns that you may have noticed on TV channels after their broadcast day. To me, it's often the best thing on.

The most common test pattern is SMPTE colour bars which have bars of various colours on the top two-thirds of the screen with a thin strip of the same colours in reverse order underneath them. Below these bars, there are three boxes on the left half, one of which is white. Left of these is black and three very dark black or grey strips underneath the second to last colour bar. These little vertical strips are called PLUGE.

Take a look at Figure 1. Due to the printing process, this may look different than it should, particularly PLUGE.

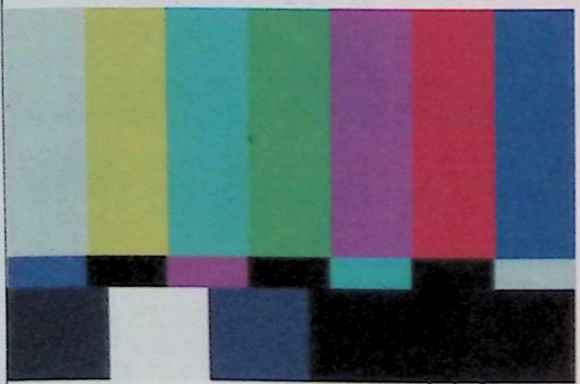
Firstly, turn your display on for about 20 minutes before you start calibrating. Next, find the colour control on your display and turn it all the way down so that you have it in black and white mode. This sets up the display to adjust brightness and contrast which should be called black and white levels respectively, if they were labeled accurately.

(1) To set the black level (brightness) you use the PLUGE where the leftmost vertical strip is not darker than the general black strip (middle) but the far right strip is still visible. You should only see black with one dark grey vertical strip in that whole bottom-right area. Remember, these are the 3 little vertical strips under the second to last colour bar in the bottom right but you should see only one when calibrated.

(2) Next, you need to set the contrast (white level) which is adjusted until the grayscale of the bars in the top two-thirds are in nice even steps from light to dark. Take a look at Figure 2 for an idea of what a properly calibrated display should look like. This assumes its translation to print hasn't mangled it too badly. Anyway, even grayscale steps are what to shoot for.

The next set of procedures require you to only look at the blue component

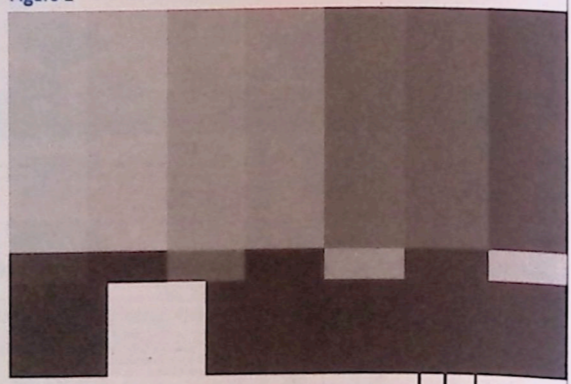
Figure 1



PLUGE - 3 strips - superblack, black and dark grey

above: SMPTE bars

Figure 2



PLUGE - 3 strips - superblack, black and dark grey
1. Adjust brightness (black) level to where superblack=black and dark grey shown

above: adjust contrast (white) until grey bars make even steps from left to right

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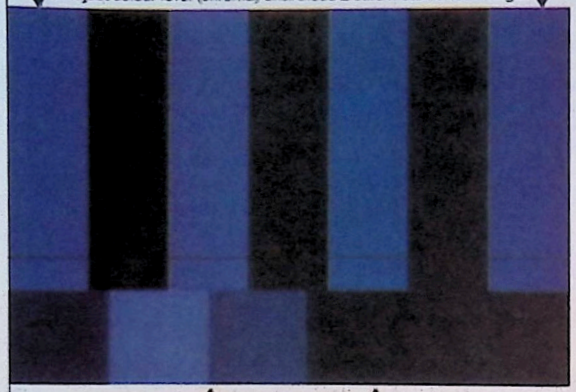
Figure 3



above: SMPTE Bars viewed through blue gel or via blue gun

of the picture which can be done either electronically if your display is super fancy-pants or via a primary blue gel like I use. Getting a primary blue lighting gel is important or you'll miscalibrate.

(3) To set the colour level correctly, adjust the colour control back up until the two outside top bars are equal in brightness to each other while looking through the gel. This is pretty apparent because the thin strip underneath each bar is made of the opposite colour you're trying to match with. When both outside bars just look longer through the blue gel, you've got it set correctly.

(4) The final adjustment is hue or tint. This adjustment uses the two inside colour bars that sit on either side of the middle green bar, which are coloured cyan and magenta. Adjust the hue or tint control until these two bars are equivalent and just look like long bars. Same as with the colour level. Take a look at Figure 3 to give an indication how it should look in the end.

One more thing though, turn sharpness completely off because it doesn't do anything good to your signal and it certainly doesn't make things actually sharper. If you've gone through all the steps then your display is as calibrated as any punter can get it. Good times.

By Andrew Carruthers

Calibration DVDs and software

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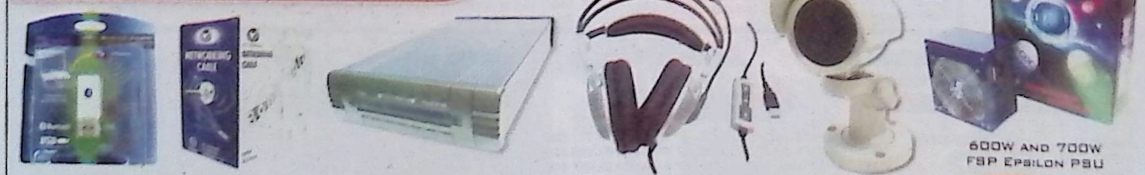

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Wireless wonder

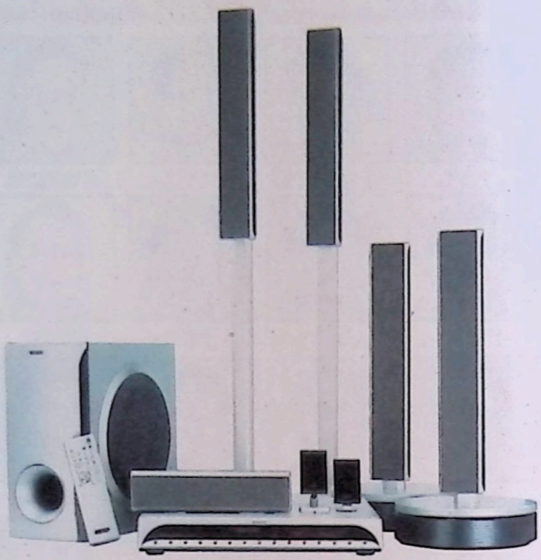
Sony's wireless home theatre rocks, but can be tricky to set up

Everything seems to be wireless these days – home networks, videogame controllers, keyboards and mice – but with the exception of the TV remote, our beloved home theatres remain wired shut.

So Sony (www.sonystyle.ca) decided to cut the cords with its DVD Wireless Home Theatre System (model # DAV-FX100W; $1,299.99), a "home theatre in a box" (HTIB) on steroids, if you will. HTIBs usually include five speakers, a subwoofer, stereo receiver/amplifier and DVD player.

Sony calls this a "wireless" system because its rear floor-standing speakers can be placed at the back of your living room – without any annoying cables running alongside the couch, La-Z-Boy or coffee table.

The good news is that Sony's wireless home theatre works – and well at that – but it can be a bit of a pain to set it all up, especially for those less technologically savvy (ironically, usually those who invest in a simpler HTIB solution).



What it is

Totaling 1,000 watts of power (5 x 143 watts + 285 watts for the subwoofer), Sony's stylish DVD Wireless Home Theatre System includes five speakers – front left and right, center speaker, rear left and right, a huge multidirectional subwoofer to place somewhere in the room and a thick silver component that houses a five-disc player and S-Master digital amplifier/receiver.

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$249 AMD Xp2800+ — ECS Mainboard, 256MB PC3200 DDR, 80GB 7200RPM HDD, LG 52x32x52 CD-RW, 64M Video Shared, 6 Channel Sound, 10/100 LAN, 16x DVD±RW +$30

All prices are already 8% cash discounted. Other form of payment will be cash discounted price plus 8%. Price subject to change without notice. All sales are final.

Actually, the receiver/amplifier may not fit in snug home theatre wall units as it measures 2.75 inches high by 17.5 inches wide by 16 inches deep, but it sure is a looker with its shiny face, minimalist buttons and aluminum top plate. Sony trades the carousel for a slot-loading mechanism, therefore you simply feed multiple discs into the unit one at a time.

This aptly-named Dream system, as Sony calls it in its marketing materials, offers a few bells and whistles not found in most other HTIBs. One is a HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) output, which offers the best audio and video quality when connected to a HDTV set, with the proper cables. Even though your DVDs offer 480 (interlaced or progressively scanned) lines of resolution, the HDMI interface can upscale the video quality to 720p or 1080i (and you can see the difference).

It also offers component, S-Video and composite ("RCA") output options, as well. Secondly, along with storing up to five DVDs (with progressive scan support) or music CDs, this unit can also read Super Audio CDs (SACDs), and can offer albums in 5.1 surround sound, whether it was recorded in multi-channel audio or remixed and remastered from the original studio tapes. Burned CDs with MP3 music or JPEG photos can also be played on this unit.

The receiver supports movies, TV shows or music DVDs with DTS (Digital Theatre Surround), Dolby Digital or Dolby Pro Logic II audio technologies.

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All prices are already 4% discounted for cash or interac, other forms of payment are on regular prices. Prices and availability are subject to change without notice. All system and components with warranty, see store for details.

Users can also add additional components to this deck, such as a cable box or satellite receiver, video game system, VCR or personal video recorder.

Setting it all up

The four 43-inch tall floor-standing speakers (2-way height adjustable) were easy enough to snap together, first by aligning the mouths of the stands, then threading the speaker wire through the center of the base before securing each tower with screws at the bottom and back of the unit. In all, it takes about 20 minutes to put it together. You could, however, choose to mount the speakers to a wall instead.

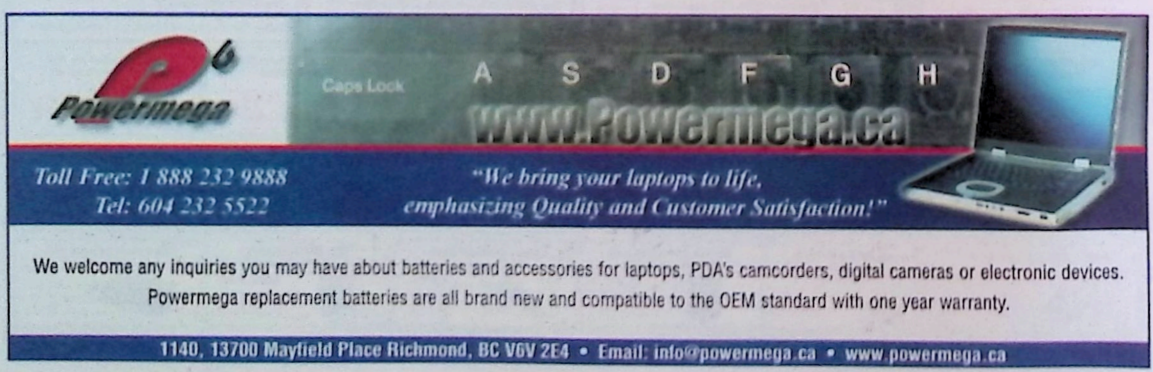
I thought Sony included an extra component in the box by mistake until I figured out this system ships with a separate (and relatively small) amp that powers the rear left and right speakers.

It was setting up the wireless rear speakers that took some time to figure out. Sony adopted DIAT wireless technology (Digital Infrared Audio Transmission) to beam the audio to the rear speakers. Along with the extra amp plugged into the wall and into the rear speakers, you also need to set up and align an infrared (IR) transmitter near your television (which plugs into your receiver/amp) and must face a matching receiver at the back of the room. You need a direct line-of-sight for this to work, so it may take a bit of trial and error, and slight furniture adjustments.

Fortunately, the pay off is worth the extra work to get the rear wireless speakers operational. The many DVDs I tested – The Lord of the Rings trilogy, King Kong and animated flicks such as Chicken Little – sounded crystal clear, loud and well-balanced between the lows, mids and highs. Music CDs and SACDs also sounded awesome.

Movie and music lovers in search of a complete home theatre solution with a few less wires to get tangled up in won't be disappointed with this Dream system. Just be forewarned it takes a bit of patience and savoir-faire to set it all up.

By Marc Saltzman



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AMD Athlon 64 x2 4400+	$1589.99 or $63/mth
Intel Celeron D 346	$1179.99 or $43/mth
Intel Pentium 4 506	$1209.99 or $44/mth
Intel Pentium 4 631	$1304.99 or $48/mth
Intel Pentium D 805	$1249.99 or $46/mth
Intel Pentium D 930	$1349.99 or $50/mth

PREMIER CHOICE BLACK

- Asus P5N32-SLI/Dx Motherboard for Intel Socket 775 or Asus A8N32-SLI/Dx Motherboard for AMD Socket 939
- Panasonic 3.5" - 1.44MB Black Floppy Disk Drive
- WDC 320Gb SATA2/300 Hard Drive Drive w/ 16Mb
- 1Gb DDR 400 or DDR2 667 RAM Memory (2x512Mb)
- Enlight Black Mid-Tower ATX Case w/ 7 Bays
- Enlight True 450W ATX Power Supply w/ 2 Fans
- Asus EAX1600XT Silent w/ 256Mb & Video In, PCI-E
- Sony DWG120A Black 16X DVD-RW w/ Software
- Sony 16X Black DVD-ROM Drive w/ 48X CDROM
- On-board 8-Channel Digital Surround Sound
- Logitech X-530 w/ 5 Speakers & Subwoofer
- US Robotics 56K Internal Fax/Modem v.90 (PCI)
- On-Board Dual Gigabit Full Duplex Network Adapter
- Viewsonic VX922 19" 2ms Digital LCD Monitor
- Keytronic KT800 104 Black Soft-Touch Keyboard
- Logitech Optical Mouse w/ Wheel w/ Mouse Pad
- MS Windows XP Home OEM w/ CD and Manual
- **5 Years Labour & 1 Year Parts Warranty**

AMD Athlon 64-3200+	$1789.99 or $60/mth
AMD Athlon 64-3500+	$1844.99 or $62/mth
AMD Athlon 64-3700+	$1874.99 or $63/mth
AMD Athlon 64 x2 3800+	$1949.99 or $65/mth
AMD Athlon 64 x2 4400+	$2129.99 or $71/mth
Intel Celeron D 346	$1699.99 or $57/mth
Intel Pentium 4 506	$1729.99 or $58/mth
Intel Pentium 4 631	$1834.99 or $61/mth
Intel Pentium D 805	$1769.99 or $59/mth
Intel Pentium D 930	$1869.99 or $63/mth

PREMIER COMPUTER CANADA COMPUTER SPECIALS ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY. THEY CAN BE CUSTOMIZED IN-STORE OR ONLINE. HTTP://WWW.PCCANADA.COM OR BY FAX AT 416-251-2218.

PREMIER COMPUTER CANADA UPGRADE BUNDLES - Sorry, no substitutions

PREMIER CELERON UPGRADE BUNDLE

Intel Retail Celeron CPU w/ Fan	331 - see web
Asus P5VDC-MX Motherboard	341 - see web
512Mb DDR Ram, PC3200	346 - see web
Enlight Mid-Tower w/ Nspire 450W	351 - see web

PREMIER SEMPRON 754 UPGRADE BUNDLE

AMD Retail Sempron CPU w/ Fan	2800+ see web
Asus K8V-X SE Motherboard	3000+ see web
512Mb DDR Ram, PC3200	3100+ see web
Enlight Mid-Tower w/ Nspire 450W	3300+ see web

PREMIER PENTIUM 4 UPGRADE BUNDLE

Intel Retail Pentium 4 CPU w/ Fan	506 - see web
Asus P5LD2 Motherboard	631 - see web
512Mb DDR2 Ram, 667Mhz	805 - see web
Chenbro Mid-Tower w/ Enlight 350W	930 - see web

PREMIER ATHLON 64 UPGRADE BUNDLE

AMD Retail Athlon 64 CPU w/ Fan	3000+ see web
Asus A8N-E Motherboard	3500+ see web
512Mb DDR Ram, PC3200	3700+ see web
Chenbro Mid-Tower w/ Enlight 450W	4400+ see web

Due to fluctuating memory and CPU pricing. Please check our web site for up-to-date pricing.

Visit us online at www.pccanada.com for up-to-date pricing, new products, secure ordering & fast shipping Canada wide.

Premier Pentium 4 Memory

AMD Sempron 2800+ (Socket 754: x64	see web
AMD Sempron 3000+ (Socket 754: x64	see web
AMD Sempron 3100+ (Socket 754: x64	see web
AMD Sempron 3300+ (Socket 754: x64	see web
AMD Athlon 64 3200+ (Socket 939) BOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 3500+ (Socket 939) BOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 3700+ (Socket 939) BOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 3800+ (Socket 939) BOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 4000+ (Socket 939) BOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 x2 3800+ (Socket 939) BVBOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 x2 4200+ (Socket 939) BVBOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 x2 4400+ (Socket 939) CDBOX	see web
AMD Opteron 144 (Socket 939) BNBOX	see web
AMD Opteron 148 (Socket 939) BNBOX	see web
AMD Opteron 165 (Socket 939) CDBOX (x2)	see web
AMD Athlon 64 FX57 (Socket 939) BNBOX	see web
AMD Athlon 64 FX60 (Socket 939) BNBOX (x2)	see web
Intel Celeron D 325 (2.53GHz) Socket 478	see web
Intel Pentium D 345 (3.0Ghz) Socket 478	see web
Intel Pentium D 331 (2.6Ghz) Socket 775 x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 336 (2.8Ghz) Socket 775 x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 341 (2.93Ghz) Socket 775 x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 346 (3.0Ghz) Socket 775 x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 351 (3.2Ghz) Socket 775 x64	see web
Intel Pentium 4 3.0 GHz @ 800 FSB (1Mb)	see web
Intel Pentium 4 3.2 GHz @ 800 FSB (1Mb)	see web
Intel Pentium 4 506 (Socket 775) 2.6Ghz/1Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium 4 631 (Socket 775) 3.0Ghz/2Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium 4 641 (Socket 775) 3.2Ghz/2Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium 4 651 (Socket 775) 3.4Ghz/2Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium 4 661 (Socket 775) 3.6Ghz/2Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium 4 670 (Socket 775) 3.8Ghz/2Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 805 (Socket 775) 2.6Ghz/2Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 925 (Socket 775) 3.0Ghz/4Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 930 (Socket 775) 3.0Ghz/4Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 940 (Socket 775) 3.2Ghz/4Mb x64	see web
Intel Pentium D 950 (Socket 775) 3.4Ghz/4Mb x64	see web

Full List of Processors Online

128 MB SDRAM PC133Mhz	see web
256 MB SDRAM PC133Mhz 6/16Chip	see web/sse web
512 MB SDRAM PC133Mhz	see web
256 MB DDR PC2400 (300Mhz)	see web
512 MB DDR PC3200 (400Mhz)	see web
1 GB DDR PC3200 (400Mhz)	see web
512 MB DDR2 PC4300 (667Mhz)	see web
1 GB DDR2 PC4300 (667Mhz)	see web

Full List of OCZ & Corsair Online

Crucial 256Mb Flash Memory, USB 2.0	see web
512Mb Flash Memory, USB 2.0	see web
OCZ 1Gb Flash Memory, USB 2.0	see web
OCZ 2Gb Flash Memory, USB 2.0	see web

Flash and Brand Name Memory Also Available Online

Premier Accessories

Arctic Silver 5 Thermal Paste	$9.99
Arctic Cooling AT/ Silencer 5 Rev. 2 VGA Cooler	$34.99
Arctic Cooling NV Silencer 5 Rev. 3 VGA Cooler	$34.99
Arctic Cooling Freezer 64Plus Heat Sink & Fan	$34.99
Antec 80mm Case Fans w/ Blue or Red or Green or Tri-Color LEDs	$9.99
Coolermaster Hyper 48 KHC-L91 Heat Sink & fan	$44.99
Coolermaster Aquagate Mini R120 Liquid Cooling System	$129.99
Syncool Ultimate Hard Drive Cooler (Beige/Black)	$19.99
Thermaltake Blue OS II Heat Pipe & Fan	$44.99
Thermaltake Big Typhoon Heat Pipe & Fan	$74.99
Thermaltake Silent 775 Heat Sink & Fan (Socket 775)	$34.99
Thermaltake Fans 80mm / 92mm	$9.99/$10.99
Thermaltake Extreme Spirit (A1609) Chipset Cooler	$14.99
Vantec Dual 5 in Hard Drive Cooler	$14.99
Vantec Spectrum Fan Card (Blue)	$19.99
Vantec Stealth Case Fans 80mm/120mm	$9.99/$19.99
Zalman CNPS7000-Cu Silent Copper Heat Sink & fan	$44.99
Zalman CNPS7700-Cu Silent Copper Heat Sink & fan	$49.99
Zalman CNPS9500LED Silent Copper Heat Sink & fan	$64.99
Zalman Flexible FX-CT Silent Copper Heat Sink & fan	$54.99
Zalman VF700-Alcu Copper/Aluminium Vibrorant Heat Sink & fan	$29.99
Zalman ZM-NB47J Northridge Heat Sink	$9.99

Full List of Cooling Supplies Available Online

Vantec Nexstar 2 External 3.5in Enclosure, USB 2.0	$19.99
Vantec Nexstar 2 External 3.5in Enclosure, USB 2.0	$34.99
Vantec Nexstar 2 External 3.5in Enclosure, USB 2.0 & Firewire	$49.99
Vantec Nexstar 2 External 3.5in Enclosure, USB 2.0	$39.99
Vantec Nexstar 2 External 3.5in Enclosure, USB 2.0 & Firewire	$54.99
Vantec Nexstar 3 External 3.5in Enclosure, USB 2.0 & E-SATA	$49.99
Removable EIDE Hard Drive Rack w/ Fan (Black or Beige)	$14.99

Premier Motherboards

Motherboards for AMD CPUs

Abit AN8 32X, Socket 939, nForce CK804/CK804 Chipset (ATX) SLI	$215.99
Abit KU8, Socket 754, ULI M1689 (ATX)	$69.99
Abit KN8, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX)	$94.99
Abit AV8, Socket 939, nForce4 Ultra (ATX)	$114.99
Abit UL8, Socket 939, ULi M1689 (ATX)	$74.99
Asus K8V-X SE, Socket 754, K8T800 (ATX)	$69.99
Asus A8V, Socket 939, K8T800Pro (ATX)	$94.99
Asus A8V-E SE, Socket 939, K8T890 (ATX)	$79.99
Asus A8N5X, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX)	$94.99
Asus A8N-VM CSM, Socket 939, GeForce 6150 (mATX)	$94.99
Asus A8N-E, Socket 939, nForce4 Ultra (ATX)	$109.99
Asus A8N-SLI, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX) SLI	$124.99
Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX) SLI	$164.99
Asus A8N32 SLI Deluxe, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX) SLI	$219.99
Asus A8R-MVP, Socket 939, ATI Crossfire (ATX)	$174.99
Asus A8V Deluxe, Socket 939, ATI Crossfire (ATX)	$229.99
Asus M2N32-SLI Deluxe, Socket AM2, nForce C510 (ATX) SLI	Q-see web
Asrock K7S41GX, Socket A, SiS741GX (ATX) AGP	$59.99
Asrock 939Dual-SATA2, Socket 939, ULi 1695 (ATX) AGP & PCI-E	$89.99
Asrock 939S1G32-ESATA2, Socket 939, ULi 1695 (ATX) SLI	$109.99
DFI Lanparty UT NF4 Ultra-D, Socket 939, nForce4 Ultra (ATX)	$154.99
DFI Lanparty UT NF4 Expert, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX) SLI	$239.99
ECS 761GX-M, Socket 754 (mATX) w/ Video, Sound & Lan	$49.99
ECS KM400-M2 w/ XP2800+ CPU (mATX) w/ Video, Sound & Lan	$129.99
MSI RS482M4-LD, Socket 939 (mATX) w/ Video, Sound & Lan	$89.99
MSI K8N Neo4 Platinum, Socket 939, nForce4 (ATX)	$129.99
MSI K8N Diamond Plus, Socket 939, nForce4 SLI (ATX)	$219.99

Motherboards for Intel CPUs

Asus P5VDC-MX, LGA775, Via P4M800Pro (mATX) AGP	$89.99
Asus P4P800-SE, Intel 865PE Chipset (ATX)	$99.99
Asus P5P800-SE, LGA775, Intel 865PE Chipset (ATX)	$89.99
Asus P5GD1, LGA775, Intel 915P Chipset (ATX)	$104.99
Asus P5PL2, LGA775, Intel 945PL (ATX) PCI Express	$114.99
Asus P5LD2, LGA775, Intel 945P (ATX) PCI Express	$104.99
Asus P5N32-E SLI, LGA775, nForce 570 SLI (ATX) PCI Express SLI	Q-see $214.99
Asus P5N32-SLI/Dx, LGA775, nForce4 (ATX) PCI Express SLI	Q-see $214.99
Asus P5WD2/Premium, LGA775, Intel 955X (ATX) PCI Express	Q-see $214.99
Asus P5N64-E/Premium, LGA775, nForce 570 SLI (ATX) PCI Express	$229.99
ECS P4M900-M7, Socket 775 (mATX) w/ Video, Sound & Lan	$54.99
ECS P4M800Pro-M478, Socket 478 (mATX) w/ Video, Sound & Lan	$54.99

Full List of Motherboards Available Online

Premier Video Cards

AGP Videocards

Asus v9520-X/TD FX5200 w/ 128Mb (AGP) Video Out	$44.99
Asus Extreme N6600LE/TD w/ 128Mb (AGP) Video Out	$104.99
Asus Extreme N6800/TD w/ 512Mb (AGP) Video Out	$209.99
ATI Radeon X1300Pro w/ 256Mb (AGP) Video Out	$109.99
ATI Radeon X850XT Platinum w/ 256Mb (AGP) Video Out	$249.99
ATI All-in-Wonder 2006 Edition w/ 128Mb (AGP) TV Tuner	$159.99
ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon X800XT w/ 512Mb (AGP) TV Tuner	$344.99
Matrox Millennium P750 TV/DVI w/ 64Mb (AGP)	$74.99
Sapphire Radeon 7000 w/ 64Mb (AGP) Video Out	$39.99
Sapphire Radeon 9250 w/ 128Mb (AGP) Video Out	$49.99
Sapphire Radeon 9550 w/ 128Mb (AGP) Video Out	$74.99
Sapphire Radeon X1300 w/ 256Mb (AGP) Video Out	$119.99
Sapphire Radeon X1600Pro w/ 512Mb (AGP) Video Out	$169.99

PCI Express Videocards

Asus Extreme AX300SE-X w/ 128Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$59.99
Asus Extreme AX550/2TD w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$79.99
Asus Extreme AX1300Pro/TD w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	Q-see $109.99
Asus Extreme AX1600Pro/TD w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$149.99
Asus Extreme AX1650Pro/TD w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video In/Out	$174.99
Asus Extreme AX1800XT/2DHTV w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$379.99
Asus Extreme AX1900XT/2DHTV w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$479.99
Asus Extreme EN6200TC w/ 256Mb TurboCache (PCI-E) Video Out	$89.99
Asus Extreme EN6600TC Silencer w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$104.99
Asus Extreme EN7600GT/2DHT w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	Q-see $249.99
Asus Extreme EN7600GT/2DHT w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	Q-see web
Asus Extreme EN7900GT/2DHT w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	Q-see web
ATI Radeon X1300XT w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$174.99
ATI All-in-Wonder 2006 Edition w/ 128Mb (PCI-E) TV Tuner	$159.99
ATI All-in-Wonder 2006 Edition w/ 128Mb (PCI-E) TV Tuner	$429.99
ATI Radeon X1600 Crossfire w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$249.99
ATI All-in-Wonder 2006 Edition w/ 128Mb (PCI-E) TV Tuner	$429.99
BFG GeForce 7300GS w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$99.99
BFG GeForce 7600GT OC w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$249.99
BFG GeForce 7800GT OC w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$349.99
BFG GeForce 7900GT OC w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$349.99
Sapphire X1600 Crossfire w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$204.99
Sapphire X1300 w/ 128Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$79.99
Sapphire X800 w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$179.99
Sapphire X1600GT/2 w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$199.99
Sapphire X1300 w/ 256Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$94.99
Sapphire X1600Pro w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$179.99
Sapphire X1900Pro w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$449.99
Sapphire X1900GT w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	Q-see $349.99
Sapphire X1900XT w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$614.99
Sapphire X1900XT Crossfire w/ 512Mb (PCI-E) Video Out	$614.99

Full List of Video Cards Available Online

ATI TV Wonder Pro - TV Tuner	$74.99
ATI All-in-Wonder 2006 Edition - Supports NTSC & ATSC	$129.99
Leadtek WinFast TV 2000XP Expert - FM & TV Tuner	$89.99
Leadtek WinFast PVR2000 - TV Tuner	$129.99
Leadtek WinFast DTV1000 - Digital TV Tuner	$249.99
PowerColor Theatre 550Pro -TV Tuner - PCI Express	$154.99
Sapphire Theatre Theatre 550Pro FM & TV Tuner w/ Remote	$89.99

Premier Hard Drives

40GB ATA/100 7200RPM EIDE Hard Drive	$49.99
80GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$59.99
Maxtor 80GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$64.99
Maxtor 160GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$79.99
Maxtor 250GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	$99.99
Maxtor 300GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $124.99
Maxtor 400GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $134.99
Seagate 80GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$54.99
Seagate 160GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$69.99
Seagate 250GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$94.99
Seagate 300GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	Q-see $119.99
Seagate 400GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $129.99
Seagate 500GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $149.99
WD 120GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$59.99
WD 160GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$69.99
WD 200GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$89.99
WD 320GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $109.99

Serial ATA Hard Drive Disks

Maxtor 80GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$64.99
Maxtor 160GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$79.99
Maxtor 250GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$99.99
Maxtor 300GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $124.99
Maxtor 400GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $134.99
Maxtor 500GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $159.99
Seagate 80GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$54.99
Seagate 160GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$69.99
Seagate 250GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$94.99
Seagate 300GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $119.99
Seagate 400GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $129.99
Seagate 500GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $149.99
WD 160GB SATA/150 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$69.99
WD 250GB SATA/150 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$89.99
WD 74GB SATA/150 10000RPM Raptor Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$159.99
WD 150GB SATA/150 10000RPM Raptor Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$319.99
WD 200GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$94.99
WD 320GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	$109.99
WD 400GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $129.99
WD 500GB SATA/300 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 16Mb	Q-see $149.99

Notebook Hard Disk Drives (2.5")

Samsung 40GB ATA 5400RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$89.99
Samsung 80GB ATA 5400RPM Hard Drive w/ 8Mb	$109.99

Full List of Hard Drive Brands Available Online

Mitsumi 1.44Mb Floppy Disk Drive (Black or Beige)	$14.99
Mitsumi 1.44Mb Floppy 3 ½" 15 Card Reader (Black or Beige)	$19.99
Sony 1.44Mb Floppy 3 ½" Disk Drive (Black)	$24.99
Thermaltake Ultra-Lite 742 Controller Card	$19.99
Promise SATA2300 TX4 Controller Card	$54.99
Vantec UGT-ST200 SATA/150 Controller Card	$29.99

Premier CD/DVD

Full List of Drives Available Online

Sony 52X CD-ROM Drives	$19.99
Sony 16X DVD-ROM Drive w/ 48X CDROM	$39.99
Sony DVD/CD-RW Combo (52/32/52/16) Beige/Black	$44.99
LG GSA-H10A 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $54.99
LG GSA-H20N 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $64.99
NEC 4570A 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $64.99
Pioneer DVR-111 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $64.99
Pioneer DVR-112 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $64.99
Plextor PX-760SA 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $64.99
Plextor PX-716A 16x Dual Layer DVD±RW(±R DL) Beige/Black	See Online $64.99

CD-R, CD-RW & DVD-/+R Media Available Online

Premier Sound Cards

Soundblaster 16 Pro Analog (PCI) (OEM)	$24.99
Soundblaster Audigy 4 Pro (PCI) (OEM)	$94.99
Soundblaster Audigy 2 ZS (PCI) (OEM)	$79.99
Soundblaster Audigy 2 ZS Platinum (PCI) (Retail Box)	$129.99
Soundblaster Audigy 4 Pro (PCI) (Retail Box)	$149.99
Soundblaster Audigy 4 Fatality FPS (PCI) (Retail Box)	$209.99
Soundblaster Audigy 4 Live Pro (PCI) (Retail Box)	$404.99

Premier Networking

D-Link 10/100Mbps Ethernet Card	$9.99
D-Link Gigabit Ethernet Card	$29.99
Asus WL-HDD Wireless Wireless G Ethernet Adapter	$39.99
Linksys WRT54G Wireless G Router w/ 4 Port	$89.99
Linksys WMP54GS Wireless Adapter PCI	$59.99
Linksys WPC54G Wireless Adapter PCMCIA	$59.99
Linksys WPC54GS Wireless Adapter PCMCIA	$69.99

Cables, Ends and Adapters are Available Online

SMC 10/100Mbps - 5 Port Switch	$24.99
Zoltrix DSL 300AGOE v2/SL Modem (G the Game)	$89.99
Linksys WRT54GL Wireless Router w/ 4 Port	$89.99
Linksys WRT54G2 Wireless Router w/ 4 Port	$89.99
Linksys WRT54GL Wireless 802.11g Router w/ 4 Port (Linux)	$79.99
Linksys WRT54GX Wireless Router w/ 4 Port	$109.99

Premier Cases

Economy Beige Mid-Tower Case w/ 7 Drive Bays (ATX)	$34.99
Economy Black Mid-Tower Case w/ 7 Drive Bays (ATX)	$34.99

Full Line of Thermaltake & Lian-Li Available Online

Antec Sonata II Silver Mid-Tower w/ 450W (ATX)	$134.99
Antec SLK1000B Mid-Tower w/ 350W (ATX) Case	$74.99
Antec SLK1650B Mid-Tower w/ 550W (ATX) Case	$134.99
Antec P150 Silver Tower Case (ATX) w/ 350W	$139.99
Antec Sonata II Power Tower Case (ATX) w/ 450W	$134.99
Antec Super Lanboy Aluminum Tower Case (ATX) w/ 500W	$299.99
Antec TAC620 Tower Case (ATX) w/ 550W	$264.99
Chenbro PC70 Silver Tower Case (ATX) w/ 350W	$74.99
Chenbro PC70 Black Tower Case (ATX) w/ 350W	$74.99
Chenming 4780 Steel Case w/ 7 Bays (ATX) Beige/Black	$49.99/$54.99
Enlight 7130 Mid-Tower Case (ATX) Beige/Black	$49.99/$54.99
Thermaltake Swing VM20001W2Z Black ATX Case	$74.99
Thermaltake Swing VM20001W2Z Silver ATX Case	$74.99
Thermaltake Tsunami Dream CA-1B01B-00 Black ATX Case	$144.99
Thermaltake Tsunami Dream CA-1B01S-00 Silver ATX Case	$144.99
Thermaltake Tsunami Dream CA-1B02B-00 Black ATX Case	$144.99
Thermaltake Tsunami Dream CA-1B02S-00 Silver ATX Case	$144.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000BWA Black ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000SWA Silver ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000RWA Red ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000GWA Green ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000BNA Black ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000SNA Silver ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000RNA Red ATX Case	$99.99
Thermaltake Xaser VI VA3000GNA Green ATX Case	$99.99

350W - 620W Power Supplies Available Online

Economy 350W ATX Power Supply	$19.99
Enlight 350W ATX Power Supply	$49.99
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Unlock secrets on your DVDs

HUB reveals more Easter eggs

It's been six months or so since we looked at a handful of Easter eggs hidden on your favourite DVDs.

You know, those goodies you can find by pressing a combination of buttons on your remote, which may unlock little-known extras such as humorous video clips, games, music videos, celebrity interviews or behind-the-scenes footage.

No, these aren't the bonus features listed on the back of the DVD box – these are secret gems planted by Hollywood studios to reward movie fans for finding them.

Considering Easter is just behind us, we thought it fitting to reveal a few more of these eggs you can find on many DVDs today.

The following are a few of our faves, each with step-by-step instructions on how to unlock them:

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith

Who knew Yoda was into hip-hop?

Watch the lean green dancing machine get his groove on by unlocking a hilarious clip of Yoda bustin' some moves with a posse of stormtroopers behind him.

To access it, enter the area called THX from the main menu, and then use the DVD remote to press numbers "11" (or "10+, 1," depending on your DVD player), followed by "3" and then "8," to launch the secret music clip.

"1138," by the way, refers to George Lucas' first feature film, THX 1138.

Toy Story 2: Special Edition

Pop in the second DVD from this two-disc set. Take a look at the main menu and you'll notice Woody's sheriff star. Use the four arrow buttons on the DVD remote to navigate around the menu until the star is illuminated.

Now press Enter (or Select on some DVD players) and you'll be treated to an animated outtake of Jessie's song.

Now go back to the main menu and enter the Behind the Scenes area. Then select Publicity. Once inside, highlight the sheriff star again and press Enter. This will play an outtake clip of Woody throwing a baseball.

Lastly, when you're on the main menu again, do nothing and eventually one of those green aliens will make a cameo appearance.

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Seinfeld: Season 6

Each of the Seinfeld DVD box sets contains many hidden goodies.

On Season 6, for example, pop in the first disc and select the Setup option from the main menu. Once inside, use the arrow keys to highlight the word Main Menu – but don't press Enter just yet. Instead, press the Left arrow button on your remote and then press Enter. Here you will see a clip of the Seinfeld cast talking about the Rob Reiner tribute.

Go back to the main menu and this time, enter the Extras area. Here, highlight the word Running with the Egg, Part 1 and then press the Up arrow on the DVD remote and the poison spray can will illuminate. Press Enter for a humorous secret clip.

On the second disc in this box set, select the Extras option from the main menu. Now highlight the word Setup but don't press Enter just yet. Instead, tap the Right arrow on your remote twice and the pecan will be illuminated. Now press Enter to hear Jerry talking about little-known facts about the show.

Try to find the secrets on the third and fourth disc – they exist.

Flightplan

Pop in the DVD from this Jodie Foster thriller and select Sneak Peaks from the main menu. Once inside, press the Left arrow button on the DVD remote twice and one of the in-seat display screens will be highlighted. Press Enter to watch an in-flight video shown during the film.

Go back to the main menu and select Special Features, and then choose In-Flight Movie: The Making of Flightplan. As you will see by your options, this documentary is made up of a few different featurettes. Move your DVD cursor over to the D entry (called Connecting Flights) and then tap the Left arrow button on your remote. An arrow on the screen will now be illuminated, so press Enter to access the hidden clip of the film's executive producer talking about the impact 9/11 had on the making of this film.

By Marc Saltzman

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Vidcasting gives you shows to go

Vidcasting gives you shows to go

Hot on the heels of the podcasting revolution that allowed owners of digital audio players (DAPs) to download audio broadcasts to their portable machines, the fast-growing phenomenon of video podcasting accommodates the new wave of video-supported players such as the video iPod, Creative Zen Vision:M and Toshiba Gigabeat.

Video podcast, vidcast, vodcast, vlog or videocast are all terms for essentially the same thing: a Video On Demand service that makes segments of video available for download manually or through RSS feeds and then synched to a portable media player with the help of a software client.

Here are a handful of the web's top video podcasting aggregator sites – the places to go to find video content for your digital audio player.

iTunes

http://www.apple.com/itunes

Apple's iTunes Music Store offers a healthy selection of video content including music videos and a variety of TV and movie content that can be downloaded for free and auto-synched with a video iPod through iTunes.

Video content can be found in the Podcasts section of the iTunes Music Store under the "Video Podcasts" link.

By clicking on a show, you'll see a description and any reader feedback and ratings that have been left. You can then select individual episodes of the show to download from a master list, or subscribe to the whole show through iTunes, which will then automatically download new shows when they become available.

Aside from independent vidcasts in a variety of categories including Arts & Entertainment, Technology, Travel and Business, iTunes also offers TV briefs from channels like MTV, Discovery Channel and G4 Tech TV – all for free.

ZENcast

www.zencast.com

ZENcast.com works in conjunction with the ZENcast Organizer software to allow owners of Creative audio players (including the video-capable Zen Vision:M) to download content and sync it with their devices.

The majority of downloads at ZENcast.com are audio-only, but there are a handful of vidcasts in each section that are denoted by a separate icon. The vidcasts, all free, include video blogs and independent video podcast shows as well as corporate news content from sources including CNET, BBC and ESPN.

Content is divided into sections including Lifestyle, Entertainment, IT & Hardware and World Affairs with sub-categories.

Unfortunately there's no comments or ratings system to separate the wheat from the chaff. There aren't even full descriptions of the download, leaving users to take a chance simply based on the title.

Sources for vidcasts

Diggnation (digg.com)
Weekly show based on the top stories from the technology news web site Digg.com. Hosted by Kevin Rose and Alex Albrecht.

Labrats (www.labrats.tv)
Tips and tricks about consumer technology, hosted by Andy Walker and HUB's own Sean Carruthers.

Learn Excel from MrExcel (www.mrexcel.com/podcast/learnexcelpodcast.html)
Host Bill Jelen provides daily 2-minute video tutorials that cover some aspect of working with Microsoft Excel.

Photoshop TV (www.photoshoptv.com)
Hosted by National Association of Photoshop Professionals members Scott Kelby, Dave Cross and Matt Kloskowski, who provide news, tips and shortcuts on Photoshop and digital imaging.

Ripplecast (www.rippletraining.com/ripplecasts.htm)
This collection of movies and tutorials, created by Apple-certified instructors, covers advanced multimedia topics including image management, vlogging, editing RAW images and protecting video with watermarks.

ScreensCastOnline (http://screencastsonline.com/sco)
Hosted by Don McAllister, this weekly show is devoted to tutorials for Mac, iPod and iTunes.

TechToys Video Podcast (http://japantechtoys.blogspot.com)
For the Japanophile techies out there, this vidcast features coverage of tech expos in Japan and demonstrations of quirky Japanese gadgets. Like industrial robots.

Mefeedia

www.mefeedia.com

Mefeedia is home to more than 300,000 independent videos and videoblogs. The site supports RSS feeds and can integrate with iTunes and Sony's PSP Media Manager. Users must sign up for the free service. You can find some very esoteric stuff here, from independent art movies to burlesque game shows to autobiographical video diaries.

Content is ranked by popularity. There are descriptions for the vidcasts, and many of them have reviews (although it's unclear who's doing the reviewing.)

Digital Podcast

www.digitalpodcast.com

Digital Podcast is a podcast aggregator with a separate category for video podcasts, all content is free and supports subscriptions or individual downloads. There are good descriptions for each download, as well as a review system for feedback and a numerical ratings system. As well, content can be sorted in a variety of ways – something Digital Podcast does better than all other sites reviewed – including date added, title and rating.

By Erin Bell

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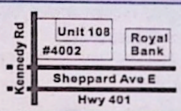

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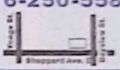

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ATI SAP X800GTO GDDR3 256M PCIE	$168
ATI SAP X1600Pro 256M / 512M PCIE	$125/148
ASUS GF 8600GT 128M / 256M DDR3 PCIE	$168/185
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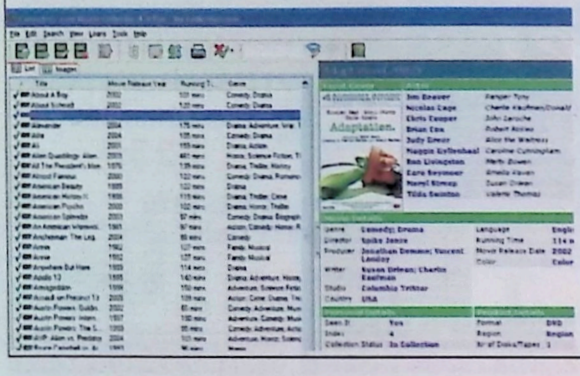
Organize your stuff

Collections are hard work.

I'm reminded of my father, who owned thousands of pieces of vinyl. For each of his albums he manually typed detailed information – cataloging not just track titles and band members, but also producers, engineers and guest artists – on colour-coded pieces of paper which he then filed in a library of more than a dozen black binders. He used red sticker tape to number his albums so he could find them. Needless to say, months of his life were poured into the management of his collection.

Alas, his obsessive collector gene was passed on to me – though my vice



Handheld Barcode Scanners

Many organizer applications that handle items with barcodes provide users the option of entering data via a handheld barcode scanner. These devices can be pricey, but if your collection is big enough a scanner can shave days off of your initial cataloguing effort.

The catch is finding one; barcode scanners are typically sold to industry rather than consumers. If you can't find one at your local electronics store try searching online.

The Microvision Flic scanner (www.flicscanner.com) is recommended by many collection software developers. A tethered version goes for around $120 at most online retailers while a wireless Bluetooth model will run you around $300.

A slightly cheaper option is the Xi1000 from POS-X (www.pos-x.com), which can be found selling for as little as $75 on some websites. Plus, it comes highly recommended by point-of-sale industry experts for its durability and ease of use.

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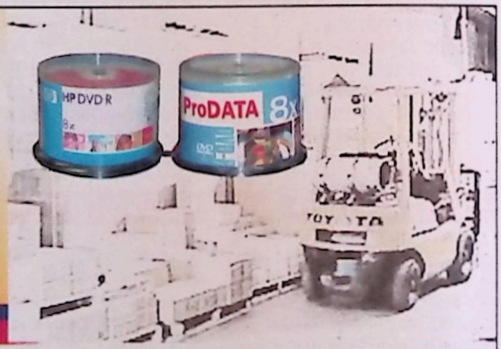

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is movies rather than music. I've managed to amass more a thousand DVDs, and I recently decided that I wanted to begin cataloging them. However, I wasn't about to haul out an old typewriter and a sticker gun. My tools would be a bit more modern: a software application and a handheld scanner.

The trick was in determining the best application for the job; there are dozens of DVD collection software packages on the market. I ended up downloading and testing a variety of options before settling on Movie Collector from Collectorz (www.collectorz.com), a company based in The Netherlands that specializes in organizer applications for all sorts of collections, ranging from video games and comics to CDs and MP3s.

Movie Collector satisfied just about every need I had, and provided features to handle collection management tasks I hadn't even thought about, like rating each movie and tracking borrowed items, the latter much to the dismay of my deadbeat friends.

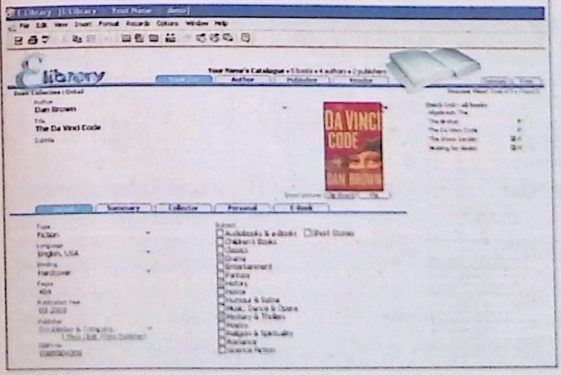
Once a DVD is entered – either manually by typing its name or digitally by scanning its barcode with a handheld scanner – Movie Collector draws from online resources such as IMDB and Amazon to populate the database with all sorts of information, including box art, names of cast and crew, a movie synopsis, genre and running time. This data can then be sorted and reports created, allowing users to access all kinds of collection stats, such as which DVDs they have yet to watch or the number of movies they own that were originally released in the 70s.

All of Collectorz' organizers function similarly to one another, which makes them an appealing option for managing multiple collections. The downside is that each application is sold separately, and they run around $50 each.

Movie Collector whetted my appetite to try more organizers. I decided my modest collection of wines could do with some administration, so I downloaded Vintage Manager from Illinois-based Indian Wine (www.vintagemanager.com).

This complex application runs a SQL backend (don't worry – everything is installed and configured automatically) and provides nearly comprehensive cellar management functionality. Once a bottle is catalogued by label, appellation, winery, and vintage, users can proceed to add a wide variety of additional information, including dollar value, tasting notes, reviews from critical journals, and matching recipes. If you have a large collection you can track each bottle's location by rack row and column number, and even set up multiple cellars.

Vintage Manager's presentation is a little rough around the edges – I noticed a number of typos and language problems – but these issues can be overlooked given the sheer power of the application. A basic



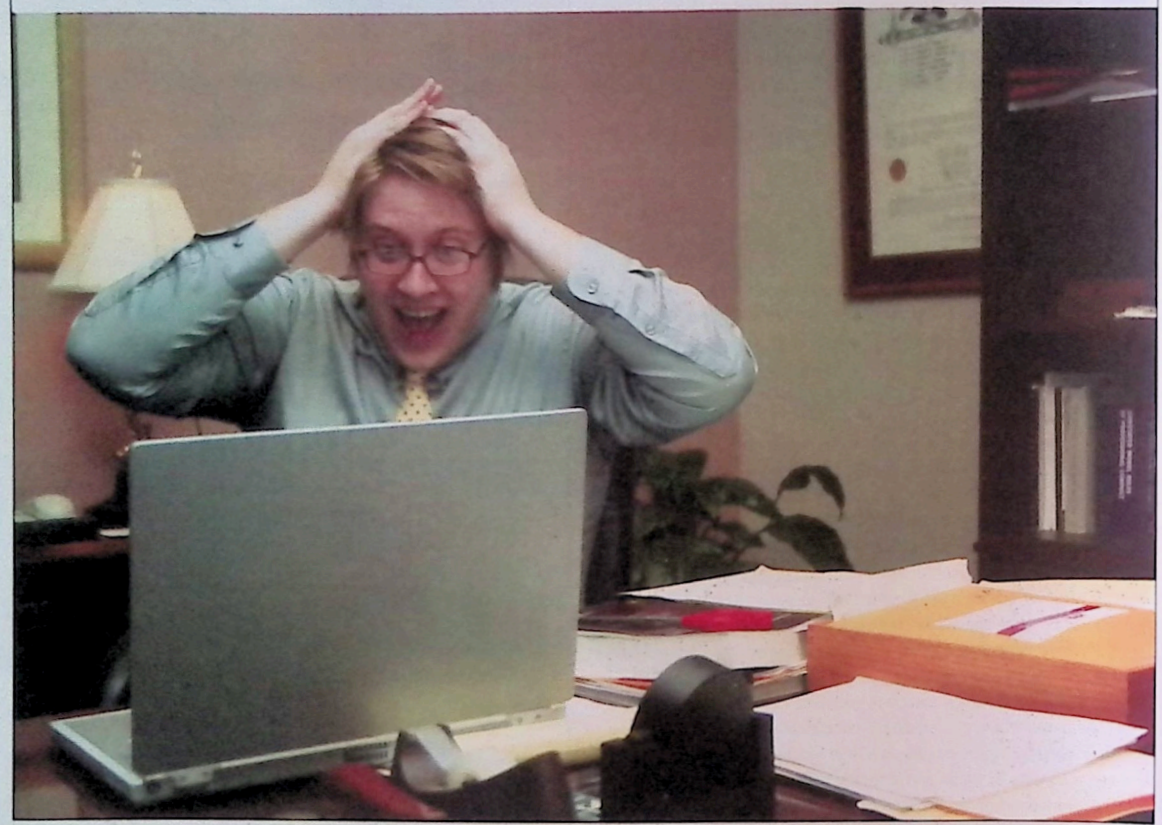
version can be downloaded for a little less than $60 while the professional version (used by many restaurant sommeliers) can be purchased for about $120.

Bottles organized, I moved on to another of my collections: books. To manage my many shelves of fiction and non-fiction I installed Graphicalic's E-Library (www.graphicalic.dk/e-library).

Sporting an accessible and intuitive graphical interface that allows users to quickly sort their tomes by title, author, publisher, and vendor, E-Library draws from an extensive database of widely available books to provide access to author biographies, abstracts, and publication information. Users can also catalogue e-books, track which books have been borrowed from their libraries and access popular online book stores with a single mouse click. The entire package costs less than $30.

Regardless of the composition of your collection, rest assured there is a specialized software application designed to manage it. All you have to ask yourself is whether it's worth spending a few bucks to get organized. To answer that question, I just think about the hundreds of hours my dad spent behind his typewriter.

By Chad Sapieha



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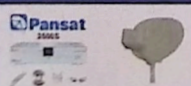

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One Laptop per child

Can a $100 laptop bridge the digital divide?

Poverty-stricken children in developing countries are in desperate need of many things: food, medicine, shelter, safety... and laptops?

One Laptop Per Child is a Delaware-based non-profit organization chaired by Nicholas Negroponte, professor of Media Technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), founder of Wired magazine, and a founding chairman of the MIT Laboratory. The organization's goal is to manufacture durable and robust laptops for what seems like the impossibly low cost of US$100, and distribute them to children in developing countries around the world. The initiative is seen as a means of bridging the so-called "digital divide" that gives rich countries access to technology and the ability to communicate globally, while leaving poorer countries in the dark.

"Laptops are both a window and a tool," says Negroponte on the One Laptop Per Child web site (http://laptop.org). "A window into the world and a tool with which to think."

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Negroponte's vision for the $100 laptop involves seeing it become a ubiquitous fixture for schoolchildren. It would be textbook, communication tool and word processor all in one, and, failing that, it could at least serve as the only light source in the home.

While a $100 laptop may sound like nothing but idealistic vapourware, it's actually edging closer and closer towards becoming a reality. Corporate backers for the project include Google, Red Hat, Advanced Micro Devices, and Brightstar Corp. On Nov. 16, 2005, a working prototype was unveiled by Negroponte and UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, Africa. On April 16 it was announced that Quanta Computer Inc. of Taiwan had finished assembling the circuit boards and had shifted into post-production testing and debugging. Argentina is reported to have already purchased between 500,000 and 1 million laptops, and other countries including China, Nigeria, Brazil, India, Egypt and Thailand have also expressed interest.

Keeping the cost down

Several things are contributing to the incredible $100 price tag, including drastically reducing the cost of the screen, trimming a lot of the fat away from the traditional laptop design, and implementing a business plan of mass-producing the units by the millions.

The laptop's screen was designed by Mary Lou Jepsen, OLPC's chief technology officer (and the former CTO of Intel). It's an eight-inch rear-projection display (as opposed to LCD) and runs in high-resolution monochrome mode for word processing, and low-resolution colour mode for things like Internet surfing.

The laptop has a 400MHz processor, three USB ports, microphone and headphone jacks, and a 128MB flash memory hard drive, according to the latest specs posted on the web site. The machine doesn't get that hot because of the relatively slow processor and lack of disk drive, so there's no cooling system.

The laptop features several ingenious design decisions, including a carrying strap that converts to AC cord and adapter, and a detachable hand crank for situations where electricity is not available – the

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hand crank for situations where electricity is not available – the crank promises ten minutes of power per rotation. The prototype also features a hinge so that the unit can open up to a writing tablet, be flipped up to be watched as a video player, or used in traditional laptop fashion in conjunction with a QWERTY keyboard and touchpad.

Negroponte is also adamant about keeping the project open-source to avoid software licensing costs that run up the price of laptops at retail. "Today's laptops have become obese," he states. "Two-thirds of their software is used to manage the other third, which mostly does the same functions nine different ways." The $100 laptop runs on Linux, a free open-source operating system supplied by Red Hat (according to a Wall Street Journal article, Steve Jobs' offer of Mac OS X was declined because it was not open source).

Perhaps the most significant feature of the $100 laptop is its promise of out-of-box access to email and the Internet courtesy of built-in WiFi. The laptops also have the ability to create a peer-to-peer "mesh network" with other machines, for areas where telecommunication networks are either non-existent or prohibitively expensive. This "mesh" technology is being developed at MIT; there's no clear word yet on how far the mesh network will be able to extend.

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Social responsibilities

Certain voices are less than optimistic about viability of the $100 laptop. Some argue that $100, while a relative pittance by our standards, is still too expensive. The average daily wage in Ethiopia, for example, is US$1 per day, while in Mozambique, minimum wage is only US$53.3 per month, making even a $100 laptop a luxury that many countries can ill-afford.

There's also a concern that the laptops will end up on the black market, sold by the children's parents for cash, and ultimately make their way into the hands of adults who see a laptop with Internet access as a valuable commercial tool. Negroponte has addressed such criticism by predicting that no more than two per cent of the laptops should fall into the grey market, because his goal is to make the laptop so pervasive that it would instantly be associated with the classroom. (He compares stealing the distinctively coloured and shaped laptop to stealing a mail truck.)

There are also social concerns. Just how useful will the laptops be if there's no educational infrastructure in place to help children understand how to use them? Will the introduction of technology help the community, or merely disrupt it? How equipped are parents and teachers to monitor what children are doing on the Internet and protect them from its shadier aspects?

Asks technology blogger Dave Rogers, "Will all these connections facilitate education, or will they serve as distractions? The world needs doctors, engineers (the kind that know how to work with atoms – you know, "real" engineers) and lawyers, not just file-sharers and webloggers."

In a study published in 2002 called "Reconceptualizing the Digital Divide", University of California Associate Professor Mark Warschauer described cases where attempting to introduce technology into communities failed due to social factors that weren't taken into consideration. In New Delhi, for example, computer kiosks were installed into poor neighbourhoods with the goal of teaching children how to use the Internet. The initiative was only partially successful due to factors including lack of community organization, the fact that the community wasn't consulted about the placement of the kiosks, lack of organized instruction on how to use the kiosks, and the unreliability of the Internet connection.

A similar initiative to modernize the small village of Ennis, Ireland by providing an Internet-ready PC to every family, a Web site for every business, and smart cards for each person, met with similarly disappointing results. According to the study, a visit to Ennis three years later indicated that "the town had little to show for its money. Advanced technology had been thrust into people's hands with little preparation. Training programs had been run, but they were not sufficiently accompanied by awareness programs as to why people should use the new technology in the first place. And in some instances, well-functioning social systems were disrupted in order to make way for the showcase technology."

The study observed that problems can arise with initiatives that are intent on providing hardware and software, but are not considerate of the social implications

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of these actions, nor the fact that in many cases, social change must take place in order to properly receive the technology.

"Meaningful access to ICT [information and communication technology] encompasses far more than merely providing computers and Internet connections," Warschauer concludes. "Rather, access to ICT is embedded in a complex array of factors encompassing physical, digital, human, and social resources and relationships. Content and language, literacy and education, and community and institutional structures must all be taken into account if meaningful access to new technologies is to be provided."

Dr. Gillian Kerr, psychologist and founder of RealWorld Systems (www.realworldsystems.net), proposes rolling out the One Laptop Per Child initiative along with community training programs that teach users about the Web, and perhaps introductory games or other interactive programs to help young people create avatars and learn to communicate safely.

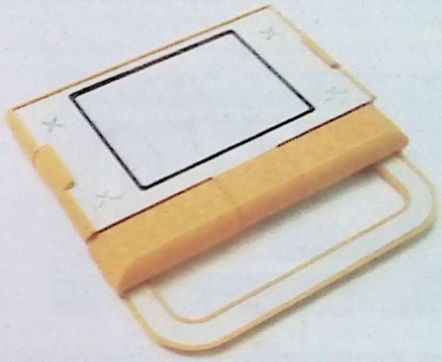
She stresses that OLPC has to be sensitive to how computers are used in the context of the culture they're being introduced to, and needs to create initiatives to monitor and minimize the destructive aspects as defined by that particular country. "Democratic involvement and participation in local decision-making is admirable in some countries and forbidden in others," she points out. "Educated and articulate girls are hoped for in some places and feared in others. Introducing societies to the internet will never be an easy or obvious process because all of the problems and opportunities of the global community are manifested on the Internet."

Despite the potential dangers, Kerr is uncomfortable with the idea of restricting Internet access to communities that aren't perceived as having the resources or sophistication to manage it.

"It's a bit like refusing to teach people how to read because they might get the wrong ideas. It's true that Internet access presents dangers to children, and responsible communities and programs need to build in safeguards, but I'm not convinced that those dangers are worse than the risks of illiteracy."

It's a sentiment that seems to sum up the One Laptop Per Child project nicely. Idealistic and naïve, perhaps, but at least someone is making the effort to bridge the digital divide.

By Erin Bell



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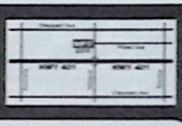

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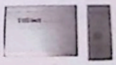
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Moving to Mac: Intel Inside

The biggest news in the world of Mac (a small virus scare aside) is undoubtedly Apple's decision last year to transition its entire lineup of computers over to Intel processors. For some, it was a strange move: after all, the company had been touting the superiority of the PowerPC processor over Intel's models for a while, even going so far as to refer to the 64-bit G5 processor as "the fastest processor ever" at launch.

A lot can change in a short time, however. Intel's chips kept getting faster and more energy efficient, while the G5 was finding it hard to keep up, especially in production numbers. With their continuing inability to get a G5 processor into a notebook form factor without melting all of the notebook's innards, Apple realized that a change had to be made. Thus the transition to Intel's new Core Duo line of processors in early January with the iMac, followed by the MacBook Pro in February and the Mac Mini in March.

During his keynote at MacWorld in January, Steve Jobs repeatedly pointed out that the move to the Intel processor would boost the Mac's speed by a factor of two to five times, and to show how peppy the new Intel iMacs were, he showed a few benchmark numbers. During my many years of benchmarking PCs I've learned to regard benchmarking numbers suspiciously, especially when there isn't a range of different tests involved in the benchmark. So I figured the best thing to do would be to get my hands on one of the new iMacs and give it a few speed tests against the most recent version of the G5 iMac.

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I got my hands on the 17-inch iMac with a 1.83 GHz Core Duo processor inside, and was able to compare it to a 17-inch iMac with a 1.9 GHz G5 processor with the same amount of RAM (1.5GB). There are a few other tweaks inside the computers; the Intel version bumps the bus speed from 633 MHz to 667 MHz, and increases the L2 cache from 512KB to a whopping 2MB to handle both cores. The graphics component has also been upgraded

from the ATI Radeon X600 to the X1600. All of these things should add up to a performance gain... but how much of a gain?

Surprisingly, Apple's claim of two to five times was pretty accurate not only with the SPEC synthetic benchmark it quoted during the keynote, but with real world applications too.

For example, rendering a seven-minute long Quicktime file from 640 x 480 H.264 into an iPod-ready file took the G5 machine about 18 minutes, while the Intel machine did it in just over 7 minutes.

Handbrake, a program designed to rip DVDs straight to MP4 files, took 20 minutes 49 seconds to render one chapter of a DVD on our G5 machine, while it accomplished that same task on the Intel machine in only 4 minutes and 17 seconds.

And in Adobe PhotoShop CS2, which many guessed would suffer for the move, the Intel machine managed to outperform the G5 in the tests we ran, including application of radial blur to a large image in 1 minute 40 seconds (Intel) instead of 2 minutes 28 seconds (G5).

In other words, the bottom line seems to be that the speed of the Intel Macs really are faster than the G5, so long as you pick applications that are able to run.

By Sean Carruthers

Are your apps Intel-compatible?

One of the things that Apple hasn't exactly been trumpeting about the new Intel-based Macs is that they won't actually run all of the Mac applications currently on the market. It's not surprising, really: the switch to a new processor means that the code for many of these applications requires rewriting in order to execute properly, and some applications will be harder than others to convert.

While Apple made pretty sure that its core consumer-friendly applications were ready to go when the first Intel Macs went out the door, there are still a wide variety of applications out there – both from Apple and third-party developers – that aren't optimized for the new processors. Thankfully, Apple wisely included emulation software known as Rosetta, which is designed to translate PowerPC-compatible software into Intel-friendly instructions, but at a cost to performance. Unfortunately, until applications become "Universal" – that is to say, able to execute natively on either PowerPC or Intel Macs – a lot of software out there is theoretically hobbled.

The bad news first: most pro applications won't run at all on the new processors. That includes things like Final Cut (both Pro and Express), Aperture and Logic. Apple has promised that its pro applications will make the transition to Universal version within a matter of months, and users of the old versions can pay a small amount ($30-60 depending on the app) to "crossgrade" to Universal versions of the software.

The good news is that the majority of software that currently runs on a G5 will execute on the new Intel machines, using Rosetta.

While Adobe surprised a number of Mac users by announcing that they wouldn't release a Universal version of its Creative Suite software until the next revision of the suite, it does seem to run on the Intel iMac.

A short list of things that seemed to work just fine on our Intel-based test machine: iLife Apps (iTunes, iPhoto, iMovie, iDVD, GarageBand); iWork Apps (Pages, Keynote); Safari; Firefox; iChat; Adobe Creative Suite CS2; Adobe Photoshop Elements; MSN Messenger.mac; Office 2004 (after an update) and Skype.

In addition to the pro apps, there were a few other things thing didn't seem to work on our machine. The first was Internet Explorer, but that's not all that surprising – in fact, Microsoft has stopped development on the Mac version of IE altogether.

The other item we tried that just simply didn't work was one we were really curious about, and that's Microsoft's Virtual PC, which allowed users to run Windows in emulation on their Mac. Again, that's not terribly surprising when it comes right down to it; even if it did work, it would essentially be running emulation under emulation, which would slow the machine to an utter crawl.

Thankfully, Virtual PC is no longer even an issue with the new Macs, thanks to the efforts of the folks at onmac.net as well as the Apple release of BootCamp beta, both of which allow Windows XP to be installed on your Intel-based Mac. But that will have to wait until next month's column.

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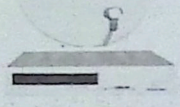

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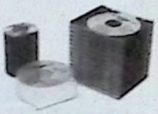

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Before you think you have to hire a multimedia expert to do all this, think again. If you're using Windows XP then you have a tool for doing most of the work at your disposal in Windows Movie Maker. This program can combine audio narration, still images and video into a short movie that you can edit and burn to a CD and which will play in any computer with Windows Media Player or capable of playing WMV files. The process is simple and you can achieve quite sophisticated effects using it.

Start by planning your presentation and gathering together the bits you need to put it all together. You'll need a title and all the still images and descriptions you want to include in the movie as well as any movie content.

If you haven't updated Windows Movie Maker for a while, visit www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/updates/moviemaker2.mspx and download and install the free upgrade version 2.1 – it's a quantum leap better than the previous version. Launch the program and you're ready to import your images, sound files and movie clips. To do this choose File, Import into Collections and choose the files to import – bring in everything you might use – you're not committed to using it but it's helpful to have it all handy. Files appear inside Collections which you can view by clicking the Collections button.

To assemble the movie, drag clips or still images onto the timeline across the foot of the screen. Place the elements in the order they should play. If you need to edit movie clips you can trim them to remove pieces or you can split a clip in two and place another element between them, for example. When you trim or split a clip you're not altering the original so you don't have to make copies or take any special precautions.

To vary the time a still image appears in the movie, click it to select it and drag its right most sizing handle to the right – as you do you can read off the display time – let go the mouse when you have it set to the desired value.

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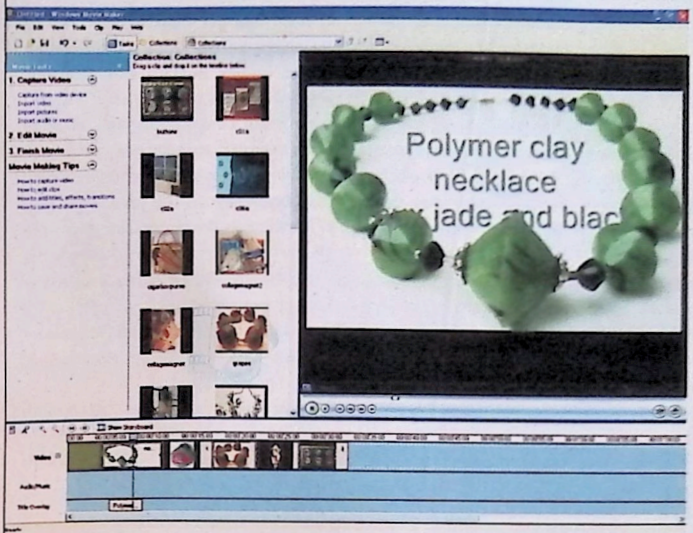


Add titles to your movie: this one is on the still image and lets us introduce the topic – it will disappear before the image does.

Titles can appear between elements in the movie – for example you may have one that starts the presentation or appears before a new topic or segment or you can position them so they appear over a still image or movie. To create a title, choose Tools, Titles and Credits and choose whether to place the title before a clip, or on it and then configure its details.

To narrate your presentation, choose Tools, Narrate Timeline and click the Start Narration button. As you speak into your microphone, Windows Movie Maker records your voice as a sound track.

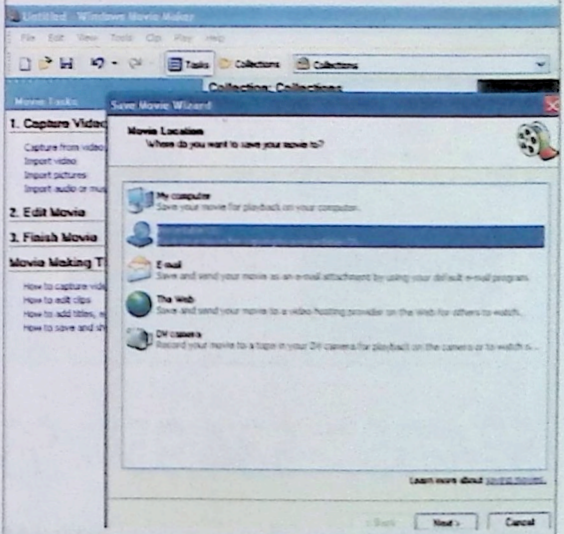
When you're done, save your project using File, Save Project – this saves a copy so you can edit it again later if needed. To encode your video, choose File, Save Movie File, select Recordable CD as the destination and click Next. Type a filename and CD name and click Next. Check to see that the movie will fit on your CD and, if not, choose different settings to bring the file size down. Click Next and the movie will be encoded.

You can, once this is done, return to your project and make another version of the movie to place on your web site, this time choose the Web as the destination for the movie.

By Helen Bradley

Helen Bradley specialises in writing hands-on tutorials. Her columns appear regularly in a number of publications in Australia, Canada, UK and the USA.

Contact Helen at helen@helenbradley.com



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Age of Empires III

Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Ensemble Studios
ESRB: Teen Rating: 4/5
Platform: Windows PC (3.0 GHz Pentium 4 with 1 GB of Kingston 400 MHz Dual Channel DDR RAM, and a 128 MB NVIDIA GeFORCE 6800 OC graphics card; displayed on an HP PL4200N 42" Plasma HDTV)

The third instalment in Ensemble's acclaimed RTS franchise doesn't introduce any earth shattering elements, but if you've enjoyed previous AOE games there's every reason to think this one will satisfy as well.

Set in the New World, players have the opportunity to play as eight great colonizing nations, ranging from Britain to the Ottoman Empire. Each force has its own set of strengths and weaknesses – the Russians, for example, begin with more resources than other countries, while the French have a talent for forging relations with Native American tribes, allowing them to begin taking advantage of native trading and technology options more quickly.

Once the game starts its RTS business as usual. You'll gather resources like food, metal, and wood and put them to use erecting buildings and growing your population, all the while exploring your surroundings and working towards various military and economic objectives. Like most strategy games, the key to success lies in ensuring that you build appropriate units for tasks currently at hand, such as cannons for town sieges and pikemen to protect against cavalry.

The franchise's gimmick of researching technology improvements and eventually upgrading the level of your civilization has returned largely unchanged – save the concept of home cities. Home cities are located in the Old World and act as a base from which to send advanced units to the New World. As the game progresses home cities grow in power and become capable of sending out a greater variety of support units.

If so little has changed you might be wondering why you should consider picking up a copy of AOEIII. That brings us back to the game's graphics, which, in my opinion, are pretty much a must-see.

Ensemble employed the same physics engine that powers Half-Life 2 to create stunning, unscripted animations, such as blades of a windmill being randomly blasted off by a squad of musketeers, and infantrymen sent soaring by the blast of a cannonball.

You'll need a pretty powerful machine to take advantage of all of the eye candy the game has to offer, but if you have the processing power it's definitely worth checking out.

By Chad Sapieha

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Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends

After scoring a hit with the historical real-time strategy (RTS) game Rise of Nations and its expansion pack, Thrones and Patriots, Big Huge Games decided to do something a little different for its next project.

Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends, due out this month for PC, will be set in a fantasy world and will feature three unique races: the Vinci (steampunk inventors and tinkerers), the magic-using Alin (based on an Arabian Knights motif), and a mysterious alien race called the Cuotl whose ship has crashed on the planet.

HUB was recently treated to a sneak peak of the game in action courtesy of Big Huge Games VP of Development & Operations Tim Train.

"We love history games, and I'm sure we'll go back to history games at some point, but we really wanted to free ourselves from the constraints," explains Train. "Yes everybody's seen a phalanx, everybody knows what a phalanx looks like, there's no question about the musketeer, and there's only so many things you can do with that in terms of special effects. What does a phalanx have for special effects? Nothing."

Besides the new setting, which Train says will give the company a chance to flex its creative muscles and push graphical boundaries, the developers are planning to push the RTS envelope in a few other ways as well.

Economy

Players in Rise of Legends will be able to kick-start their economy with a few button clicks.

Train: "One of the things we're trying to do to move RTS games forward is to get rid of that whole 10 or 15 minutes at the beginning of the game where all you're doing is building up the farms, slaughtering whatever animal happens to be in the game, and all that sort of thing. Caring about "econ" is fun, raiding or defending against raids is fun – what's not fun is doing the same thing over and over again. We wanted to get you into decision-making a lot quicker."

Neutral sites

Neutral sites occur all over the map and can be either attacked and conquered, traded with to establish caravan routes, or bought outright with enough gold.

Train: "If you choose to attack the neutral sites early, then you're going to have to lose some of your army in order to take the site. So there's this inherent trade-off of, do you want to get the neutral site early on so your opponents can't get it, or do you want to trade with it over time and be more peaceful, at which point you can buy it or even get it for free later on in the game.

Buying or conquering neutral sites actually enables the player to build unique units that they can only get from that neutral site. So the conquest of neutral sites become very important."

Dominance

There are four powers in Rise of Legends that are awarded to players for satisfying certain in-game criteria. The Military Dominance, for example, is bestowed on the player who creates the most foot soldier units, and will grant them the power to lure enemy foot soldiers over to his or her side.

Another example is the Tactical Dominance, which is awarded for destroying a certain number of enemy workers, which grants the ability to cast the Ceasefire spell that temporarily renders your enemies incapable of attacking you.

Train: "There are all these different ways you can do stuff using the Dominance that rewards really clever play and not just 'let me just build up my giant mass of guys and let me throw them into the fray,' which is what a whole lot of RTS games are all about."

National borders

Each faction in Rise of Legends has a border around its territory that can expand and shrink when a player takes over new neutral sites or uses certain technologies. As a rule, players can't build outside their national borders (although there are certain spells that can get around that).

Train: "The whole idea of national borders was huge in Rise of Nations. The thing that made us just pull our hair out with most other RTS games was the whole idea of 'oh, you built a tower behind my lines and now I lose the game because I didn't notice that you were building this castle behind my territory.' That doesn't feel very realistic. It's not like empires are won or lost because I secretly built a castle right next to your capital."

Customization vs. randomization

All of the maps in Rise of Legends are custom-designed to ensure a degree of quality and control over the artistic look, but at the same time the studio didn't want to completely sacrifice the fun that random elements add to the mix.

Items like resources (raw materials), relic bonuses, neutral sites and certain elements of the terrain are all randomized in ways that can completely change the way a map plays.

Train: "For example, you might have a big mountain that blocks you off from the other side. This randomly generated object can be a whole mountain that blocks the entire map, so then it's a transport game where you have to build transports and land armies, or it could be that there are no centre or side passageways so the only way around is this one choke-point at the north end of the map, which is where all the fighting's going to concentrate. Or you could have any combination of those things, so scouting becomes really important. One custom map can provide all of these hours of different kinds of gameplay based on what the random elements are."

By Erin Bell

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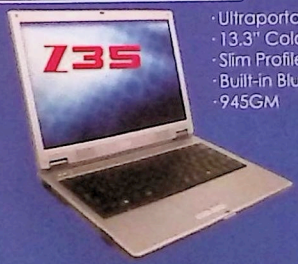

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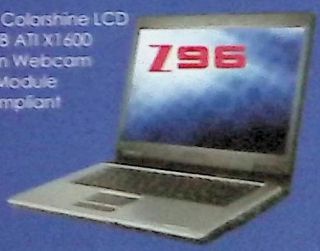

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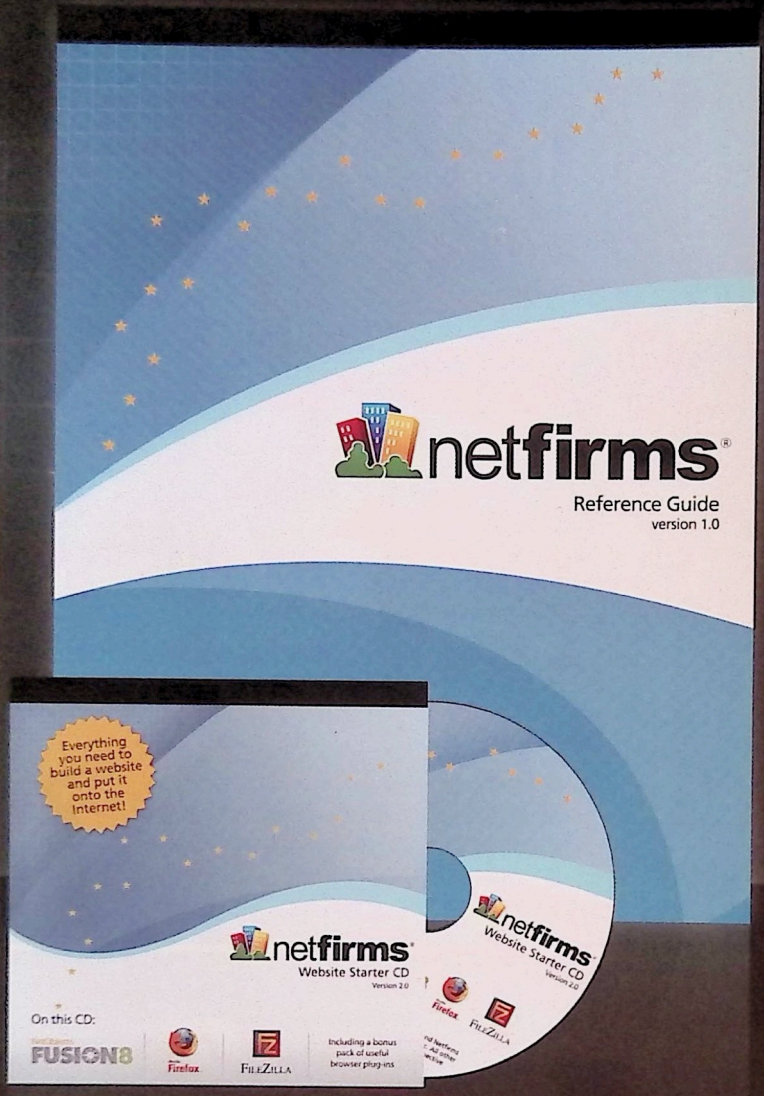

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